

Brutarian



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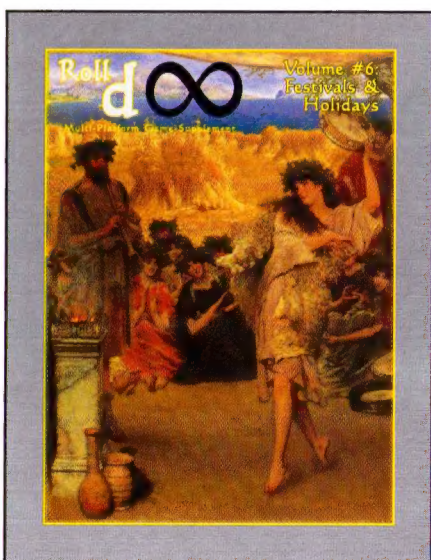
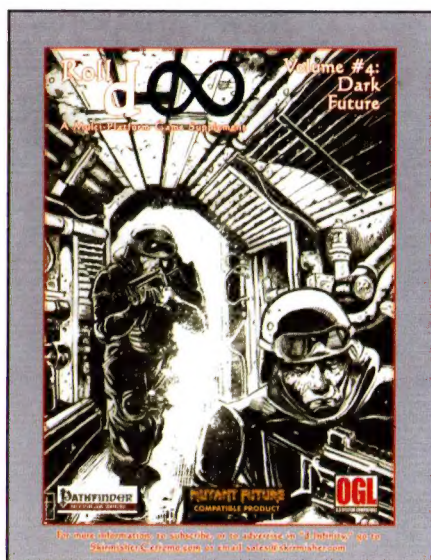
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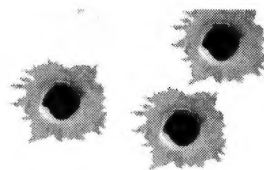
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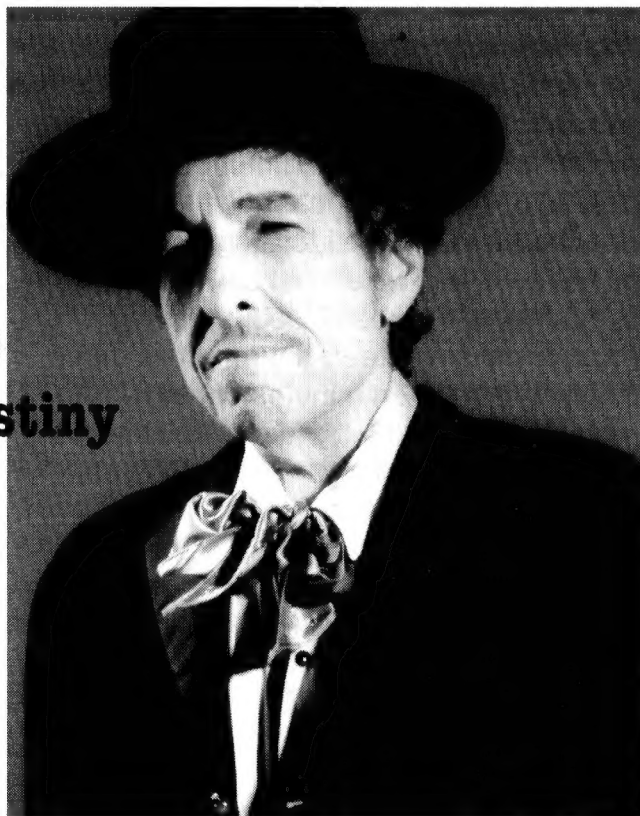


What's Inside...



The Inner Swine Guide to Ignorance by Jeff Somers.....	2
A Well Kepi Secret - Kepi Ghoulie by Oren Siegel.....	5
The Nature of the Beast - "Nature Boy" Ric Flair by David Chappell....	16
The X-Phile by Michael Varhola.....	30
School for the Dead by Cullen Bunn.....	34
The Continuing Saga of Dr. Iguana by Ken Burke.....	46
Stepping Into Oblivian with Greg Cartwright by Rich Tupica.....	56
1957 by Steve Griffin.....	72
The Last of the Independents: Richard Gordon by Keith Crocker...	76
The History of Portland Punk - Greg Sage by Marc Covert.....	93
Wiggy Soundz.....	104
Brutarian Library.....	124
Six Pack Theatre by Ozzy Fide....	144

**Only in turning up the volume
can we determine our own destiny
- Bob Dylan**

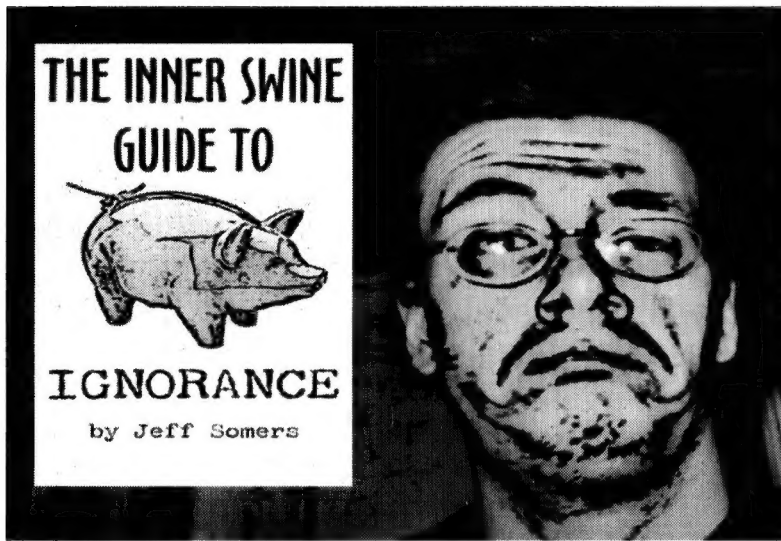


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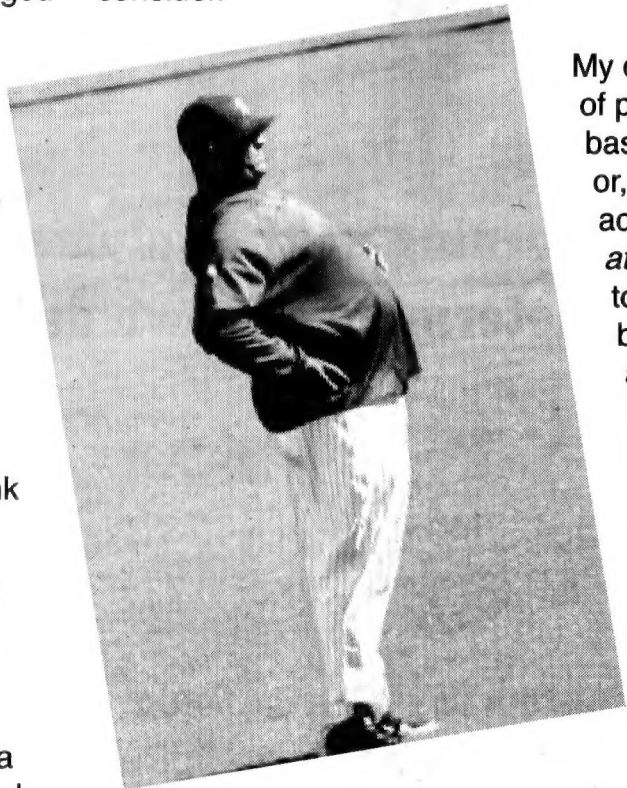
The Inner Swine *Guide to Ignorance*
by Jeff Somers

Episode Ten: Other People's Ignorance is Infuriating

FRRIENDS, some of you may be aware that the only organized sport I cotton to is baseball, despite its quaint, nineteenth-century pacing, its current affection for drugged-up hooligans, its spectacularly ineffective system of fallible human umpires instead of unbending robot overlords who incinerate spitball-tossing pitchers on the spot, and its almost complete lack of monkeys. Football? Jebus, during your typical seventeen-hour football game they play about ten minutes of actual *game*. Basketball? It's just exhausting to watch. All that running. Hockey? Surely you jest. Tennis? Not a sport.

Nope, it's baseball all the way for me. I think it appeals to the non-athlete in me; when I was a little kid and possibly the Worst Little League Baseball Player Ever in the History of Ever, it was still the age of fatty baseball players, guys like Gorman Thomas or John Kruk who looked like they trained by eating pizzas and drinking beer until they entered a transcendent state of perception that allowed them to tee off on fastballs. I could identify with those folks. I *resembled* those folks,

without the unkempt body hair or mouth full of chaw. The other sports seemed to require far more physical fitness than I was willing to consider.

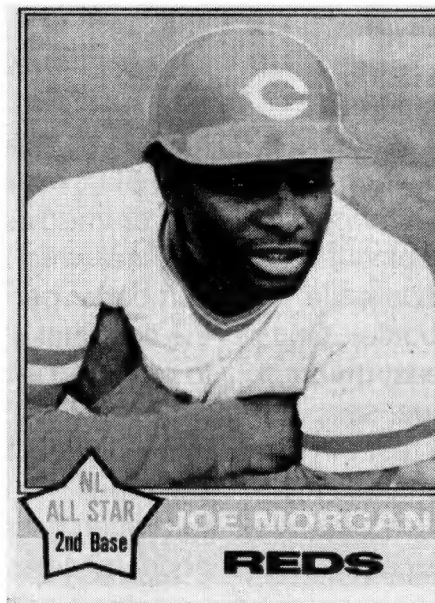


My days of playing baseball—or, more accurately, *attempting* to play baseball—are long behind me, but I still like to watch the game, and

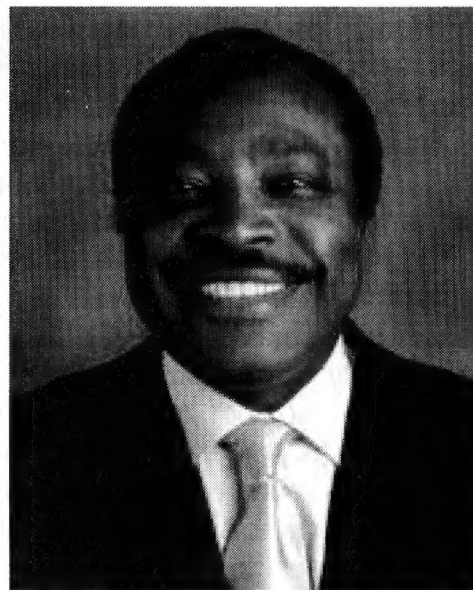
Oh, man, I shouldn't have eaten all them snacks.

manage to attend a few games every year and watch a few on TV. When the playoffs hit, I get serious and usually spend a few weeks watching a *lot* of baseball, and this is when Ignorance fucks with me yet again. Except in this situation it is not *my* ignorance that starts batting me about the head and neck like a kitten with a dying mouse. Nope, for a change it's *other people's* ignorance. Specifically, the crowd of folks that FOX Sports is convinced have never seen a baseball game before in their lives, but inexplicably tune in to the playoffs and World Series every fall.

Those who have had the unfortunate luck to sit



LEFT: One of the greatest players of all time.



RIGHT: A moron.

next to me during baseball games know that I am not keen on today's MLB TV commentators. Back in 1987, I listened to every Mets game, all 162 depressing, soul-killing games, on the radio with the fantastic Bob Murphy calling every pitch, and it has ruined me for every pretender behind a microphone since then. So, I don't much care for the commentators anyway, but the playoffs is just torture, because I'm *not* ignorant about the game of baseball, but the commentators assume everyone else *is*.

OH MY GOD I do not need to hear how the infield fly rules works again. I do not need an explanation of basic pitching theory again. I do not need to know what a changeup is again. I don't need to know that Josh Hamilton is a pretty fucking good player again. I do not need to hear why it was not a good idea to bunt in that situation, and I do not ever need to hear again ever in my life ever another of Tim McCarver's stories about how he once caught Bob Gibson.

*Don't Call it Bourbon
Or Kentuckians Will Beat You.*

This is
how other
people's
ignorance



hurts me. I never think about how my own ignorance probably hurts other people; so this is alarming. Every time something has to be over-explained to me (like, for example, every Thursday and Friday evening when it's explained to me that Jack Daniels is *Tennessee Whiskey* and not *Bourbon* after I croak out a slur that sounds kind of like *bourbon* while jabbing a crooked finger at a Jack bottle), God is probably killing a kitten. But at least my ignorance does not, to my knowledge, seep out onto the mass media and afflict the rest of you. Unless you read my novels, in which case my general ignorance of guns in a book in which everyone uses guns is probably infuriating.

What gets me about this, of course, is the assumption that people who know almost nothing about baseball actually watch the playoffs. Is this something else I'm just ignorant of? Is this a well-known fact, that people who normally never pay any attention to the game turn on the TV, notice a baseball game in prime time, and just start watching? I mean, I could

see that happening with pornography, but *baseball*? I'm dubious.

It might be an expectation that people tuning in to FOX expecting their usual swill of sitcoms and dramedies might be too lazy to change the channel when the game is on, or that a large number of people drop their remote controls on the floor just out of reach and can't be bothered to get up to retrieve it as long as *something* is on the TV. Both of these theories descend into a disdain for my fellow man that I cannot sign on to. I just cannot believe that people will watch baseball for the first time in their goddamn lives during the playoffs.

Then again, the list of things I can't believe people actually do — wear Crocs, watch *Dancing with the Stars*, vote — is so long at this point I am actually starting to doubt my own smug superiority. And if that goes, watch out, because these columns are gonna get a whole lot more interesting, in a rubberneck-a-car-crash kind of way.



A WELL KEPI SECRET

The Groovie Ghoulies and the Mysteries of Fame, Fortune, and the Whole Damn Thing

by Oren Siegel

It's past tense now, sadly, but while they were around - 1983 to 2007 - The Groovie Ghoulies made some of the most infectious pop punk around. And yes, they took their name from the 70s animated series, a spinoff of Sabrina, The Teenage Witch, by way of The Archie Show.

The aforementioned should tell you all that you need to know about where the band was coming from. That's right, cartoony punk, but punk stitched together from all manner of body parts. Hell, this was a combo that covered both Bob Dylan and The Partridge Family on the same album.

Ramones as primary influence. Yet through the course of nine LPs, five EPs, solo releases from founder Kepi and his offshoot country band The Haints, not to mention dozens of singles and split releases, you'll hear echoes of 60s garage



In other words, you could put a name to the genre in which they lurched, nevertheless, The Ghoulies influences were so vast, so all encompassing, you couldn't really tackle them all. If it helps, we could talk about The

rock and bubblegum and just about every 50s artist who mattered.

We won't even try to suss out the history of the band and its myriad line-up changes. Checking

various sources led to the discovery of at least nineteen individuals claiming themselves to be members of this ghoulish outfit. The one constant, though, was founder, lead singer, bassist, sometime drummer, and principal composer Kepi Ghoulie, and thus it was to him we turned to learn about all things Groovie.

Brutarian: You're all over the map with influences, so how would you describe your music? Who you are to those who have yet to hear you?

Kepi: [laughs] I'd just say, "A lifelong rock n' roller. Having a good time, and making the best music he can."

That sounds perfect. Why don't we start way back, when you first got into music. Do you recall when that was – just listening to music, even before you started playing?

Well, the big phase was when I was just a little kid. I listened to Elvis and Johnny Cash. And then, growing up, I think it was Kiss, The Ramones, and The Rolling Stones. When I discovered punk rock, there were the Misfits and everything. And the whole time I was in the punk rock crowd, I was still listening to Dylan and Neil Young and stuff like that, which would explain why I would do a rock record and an acoustic record. I was always into people like Young and Johnny Thunders who'd play electric and acoustic.

Did you come from a musical home?

My parents played music, but it was not music that I liked. It was country music like Kenny Rogers, Alabama, and things like that, while I was more into Johnny Cash and Hank Sr. So they were a little more into that

70's country, and I discovered most of my music on my own.

And at what age did you pick up a musical instrument?

Probably not until high school. I was probably sixteen.

What was your first choice: guitar or bass?

I started on guitar, I think, just because everybody took guitar lessons. My brother took guitar lessons, and then I went to the guy he'd went to. My brother showed me how to play drums, too. I was probably a guitar player and then a drummer before I became a bass player.



How long did it take you to join your first band after you started playing?

I had my first band in high school. It was all pretty much covers of the Rolling Stones and Ramones. [laughs] So not a lot has changed!

Let's move forward to the legendary Groovie Ghoulies. How did it start?

I had a couple of different bands in high school that would [always] break up. It really started around the fact that I wanted to make a record. My friend had a four-track, and we made the first three Groovie Ghoulies seven-inchers. We had this drum machine, me playing guitar, and my friend recording it. First I made a record, I mean three records, then I built a band around it.

Then I think there was some show I wanted to play in LA with this band called Haunted Garage [interviewed in Brutarian Issue 6], so I just grabbed all my friends and said, "Let's

make a band so we can open this show.” So we did. And it was fun! The drummer was Roy McDonald from The Muffs and Redd Kross. He played on the very first show; it was pretty funny.

On what label were the first releases issued? Did you release them on your own?

plans?

[laughs] It was all I’d wanted to do. I didn’t know if it’d be a career but, at that point, it was pretty much The Ramones and Bob Dylan? Those guys are the greatest! I knew they were the greatest, and at that time it was the only thing I wanted to do for several



Yeah, I had my own label and put them out – the first album, the first three seven-inchers were all on my label. There was a guy with a record store in LA who loaned me the money to put out my first release.

At the time, did you think you were going to pursue this as a career? What were your

more years before I could start touring.

At what age was this?

I was twenty-one to twenty-four when I was making my first records. Then The Queers took us out on our first tour and they helped us get signed to Lookout! Records. The Queers and The Smugglers and High Fives and Pansy Division, all those guys were

already on Lookout! And we were playing shows with all of them. They kind of told Lookout!, "You need to put these guys out!" And they did. It was really cool!

Were you happy about getting signed to Lookout! Records?

Oh yeah! At that time my favorite live bands were probably The Queers and The Smugglers. So to me, I was just on the greatest label in the world. Not to mention they had Green Day, but really, my friends who had these amazing bands. The Smugglers, I don't know if you know them, but they were the exact same as The Hives. Two bands going down the same path, and The Hives blew up and The Smugglers didn't. It's criminal, you know?

We feel the same about the New Bomb Turks.

Oh yeah, exactly! Powerful as Iggy Pop, amazing live band. I saw them and it was insane. I mean, there're so many bands. Why is there all this crap in the world, and why not these people who just worked so hard in their live show? Yeah, the New Bomb Turks were insanely great. Why not

them? I agree with you. It's nuts!

Something's gone bad in the 2000's, where bands who should've gotten somewhere didn't, for some reason.

Yeah. I know in Lookout! it was just a lack of marketing, and that kind of thing, I believe. The Hives were on Epitaph, and The Smugglers were on Lookout!, and Epitaph would really push those bands, and take ads out every month and, you know, just little

things that would make people notice. I know The Smugglers and High Fives were really into touring. They toured a lot and were willing to tour even more, you know? But then just one by one, they all slow down.

In retrospect, do you think that if those bands or the Groovie Ghoulies would



have been released on Epitaph, it would've been a different story regarding the amount of exposure they would have gotten?

You can't guess like that . . . I mean, you would hope for that, but Fat had its sound, and Epitaph! had its sound. I mean Lookout! had a great collection of bands. The Donnas went to Europe with Epitaph, but I think they were already big then. They

were the one band on Lookout! that were getting a huge push. There's only so many people at Lookout! so they just focused all their energy there. But again, you can't guess, you know? Chixdiggitt was on Sub Pop, which you'd think was one of the biggest labels at the time, and the guy that signed them went away, and they were just stranded on this label where they didn't fit – they weren't grunge. That could've happened if a Lookout! band ended up on Epitaph. You just never know. That was that, and on you go.

The band was extant for so long and had many personnel changes. Was there a period in the Ghoulies run you look back on most fondly?

I never had a bad time in the Ghoulies, you know? But I know for sure one of my favorite . . . well, the first tour with The Queers – what could go wrong? Then, my very next tour was with The Muffs and Chixdiggitt, who are two of my favorite bands in the world. So, oh my God, I went from a tour with The Queers to The Muffs and Chixdiggitt. Then NTX. And then NTX took us to Europe. Then we took The Donnas on their first tour. So that was a pretty magical time, it was probably '98-'99. Yet every day I'm on the road it's wonderful, I'm having some of the most enjoyable shows ever in my life right now.

Sounds like it – you really love your job!

[laughs] It's insane. Every day I can play a show I'm happy, I'm thankful. I book these solo tours now, and I play people's houses and have as much fun as giant rock shows, and there are like ten people in the house!

Sometimes even more fun.

Sometimes even more, for sure! I've been playing shows with Victor Ruggiero of The Slackers. He's the singer-keyboardist of

The Slackers. He does amazing solo shows. I totally fell in love with his music on the Warped Tour in 2004. We started playing shows last year. It's one of the funnest thing in the world, you know? He'd play drums and guitar, and I'd play bass and sing, or acoustic guitar, and Dino'd play bass. It's like an augmented one-man band. It's really fun and crazy.

Are there interesting stories from the tours you've mentioned? Something fun or strange that happened? We bet there are a lot!

There's a million! A funny one that just comes to mind was touring Canada with Chixdiggitt. We were way over to the east, Nova Scotia or something. We drove by an airport and there was this guy laying on the ground. Somebody who'd probably just passed out drunk from the night before or something. So we were all kidding, "Hey look, it's a zombie! Let's go back and take a picture of it!" So we drove back and opened the side van door to take a photo, and the guy wakes up. Totally like a zombie out of a movie, and he starts chasing our van. We're driving away screaming, "YAAAAH!" That was pretty funny. [laughing] There's something every day, if you keep your eyes open. There's a story every day.

You have a lot of unusual and interesting merchandise for sale at your shows. You paint as well as craft, at least from what we've seen on your MySpace and other websites.

Well, this applies to the shows as well, as everything I do for the shows is from the eyes of a music fan. I'm still a music fan. If I meet Iggy Pop, I'm still as giddy as a teenager. Or when someone like Lux Interior from The Cramps passes . . .

Yes, we were just talking about it.

It's a terrible, sad, sad thing. A huge



inspiration to me. And just the greatest guy in the world. We got to tour with him, and he would just treat people so kindly, and you're just like, "Oh my God." And then he comes on stage and just turns into an animal. Just insane. So . . . I just had to give a little shoutout to him as I love him so much and miss him already . . . but to get back to your question, everything I do for merch or onstage is pretty much just what I would like to see in a rock show. I would like the band to talk to the audience; I'd like, if it's possible, to have backups. I would like to make original merch. I just made something for Valentine's Day. I did a couple of songs acoustic with Vic Ruggiero that I had for Valentine's last year and they sold out. So we did another batch. And I'm not like, you know, "Oh hey, what can I do to cash in on Valentine's Day?" It's more like, "Oh, I would like this!" If the New York Dolls made a valentine I would want

it. I paint Christmas Ornaments; I sell little pieces of art. If I went to a show and I found Daniel Johnston sold art for ten dollars, oh my God. I'd be bellowing, "Woo hoo!" So I do all the things that I would like to see, or I would like to have. I just try to make them original. It helps you stay alive on the road, because it's really small. Touring in the states is not big for me; it's probably anything from ten to one hundred people. So you do things to keep you alive, but you do something you love so it doesn't become a job that you don't love.

About the touring and the fans – do you feel there is a change in the fans from the previous tours when you were with the Ghoulies?

Yeah, for sure. And I didn't know that. In Europe, it doesn't really change. In Europe, a lot of people that will like you, will like you forever. And in the United States, people

change their musical tastes from year to year. Some people remember you, some people rediscover you. A lot of people in the U.S., once they get a job or children, they stop listening to music! Which is pretty sad. So a lot of your fans would be like, "Oh, I used to love you in high school! I used to like you here and there." And I'm such a music fan that I didn't know that people did that. I still listen to the same records that I listened to in high school, but I also listen to new things, too! If a record is good, I don't get over it usually. Some people outgrow records that they used to like. That's rare with me, and I didn't realize that people weren't like that. I was like, "Whoa! I'll love rock 'n' roll forever!" [laughs] But I'm just a weirdo.

We talked about music, and you said that you still listen to the same type of music. Are you an avid music collector?

I was. I don't go as crazy as I used to. I tour a lot now, so I have this tiny little apartment. I don't collect like I used to. I used to buy any record that had any member of the Ramones on it. Like with Iggy, the Stones, Bob Dylan . . . if Bob Dylan played harmonica on one song, I'd buy it. Just a crazy collector like that. I don't do it anymore. If it comes across my path — cool. But I have enough things right now, I think. I'm good.

Well, record collecting is a bit different now. Once upon a time, you had to go to a store and browse, but

today, you can just log on eBay and search for whatever you want.

Right. And that kind of takes out some of the magic. I used to hunt down Ramones seven inches, and when I'd find one, "Oh my God! This is insane! I've never seen this," was the initial reaction. But now you can just go on eBay. I don't go on eBay because I think I'd probably go so crazy collecting things. So I really try to stay off of eBay.

There's a underlying fascination with horror movies that is clearly evidenced in all your work. What's your favorite horror movie?

Oh, man!

If it's a tough choice you can have top three.

If you look for a recurrent theme or imagery



or feel, it'd probably be all the old Universal stuff, the classic Universal stuff. I really like Tim Burton's films. I really liked Sleepy Hollow; I thought that was really cool. I don't really get into gore or slasher films like Saw and all that kind of stuff. I like monsters more than violence.

Have you ever considered composing film music? Soundtrack?

Absolutely! I'd love to do it. It's a really tough record. Soundtracks . . . most major films already have people composing their music. And some don't pay anything. But yeah, I'd totally do that. I love esoteric people like Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois. So I think it'd be really cool to do a soundtrack, for sure. I'd do it for any movie.

You've talked about influences, and I believe we neglected to mention Chuck Berry. You've opened for him, haven't you?

Yes. I got to play with him twice. As far as American rock 'n' roll songwriters go, he's the *one*. I'm just as crazy for Tom Petty and Jonathan Richman. I don't think either of those guys get the credit they deserve. The kids don't know Chuck Berry, but the history books do, which is great. I think Jonathan Richman is sadly overlooked by America, and I think Tom Petty is doing well, but for a while I don't think Tom Petty was getting his due. Song after song after song of just manifesting terrific compositional skills. But yeah, Chuck Berry is amazing, and I got to open for him twice.

What was that like?

It was totally amazing. I mean, one show was his seventy-seventh birthday. [laughing] And the next time, I think he was close to eighty. I think he's eighty-two now. It's just great. He's getting up there, but he goes out. He gets warmed up in a song or

two, and it's just amazing! The audience loves him. There's an electricity in the air, and you can actually feel it, feed off it. And he's a super nice guy. He loves his fans! He's a legend in every sense of the word. Think about it — The Beatles, The Stones, The Beach Boys, Bob Dylan — they were all heavily influenced by Chuck. He's still going, and it's great. He's just really cool, and his band is cool, and everything about him is still very rock 'n' roll!

Do you also hope to be playing at that age?

Oh, yeah! That's my goal! Chuck Berry's probably my number one inspiration right now. I wanna be rockin' when I'm eighty, you know? Don't get me wrong, I still love Motorhead, I still love Iggy, The Cramps. Anytime anybody would ask me about bands, you know, "Who inspired you?" it's always Motorhead, Iggy, The Cramps. Oh, here I go again, The Cramps were so up there. As were The Ramones and Joe Strummer, I miss them too. I would have just loved to hear what Joe Strummer would have done next. I think his last record was probably the greatest thing he ever did, Clash-wise or anything. But you just can't go wrong picking anything up by these artists. Even if they're branching out, experimenting. Even if it doesn't totally succeed. David Bowie does that; he's an artist. He goes all over, and you may not like everything he does but, in the end, he's an artist. I don't have every Bowie record, but I appreciate him for trying things and not doing the same thing every time.

Can we take you back to the Groovie Ghoulies? When you started it was about 1983.

The first incarnation of the Groovie Ghoulies was 1984.

And you continued up until a couple of years

ago — 2007? With the release of 99 Lives?

That's correct.

At the time you recorded that album, did you know that this would be the last Groovie Ghoulies' album to be released?

No. In fact, "99 Lives," the song, is kind of about indestructibility. As in, "You can't stop me!" So I didn't know. And people think this and that. They think it's a very dark record, but that record was completely written and recorded six months before the band broke up.

So at the time it wasn't planned?

Yeah, it wasn't planned.

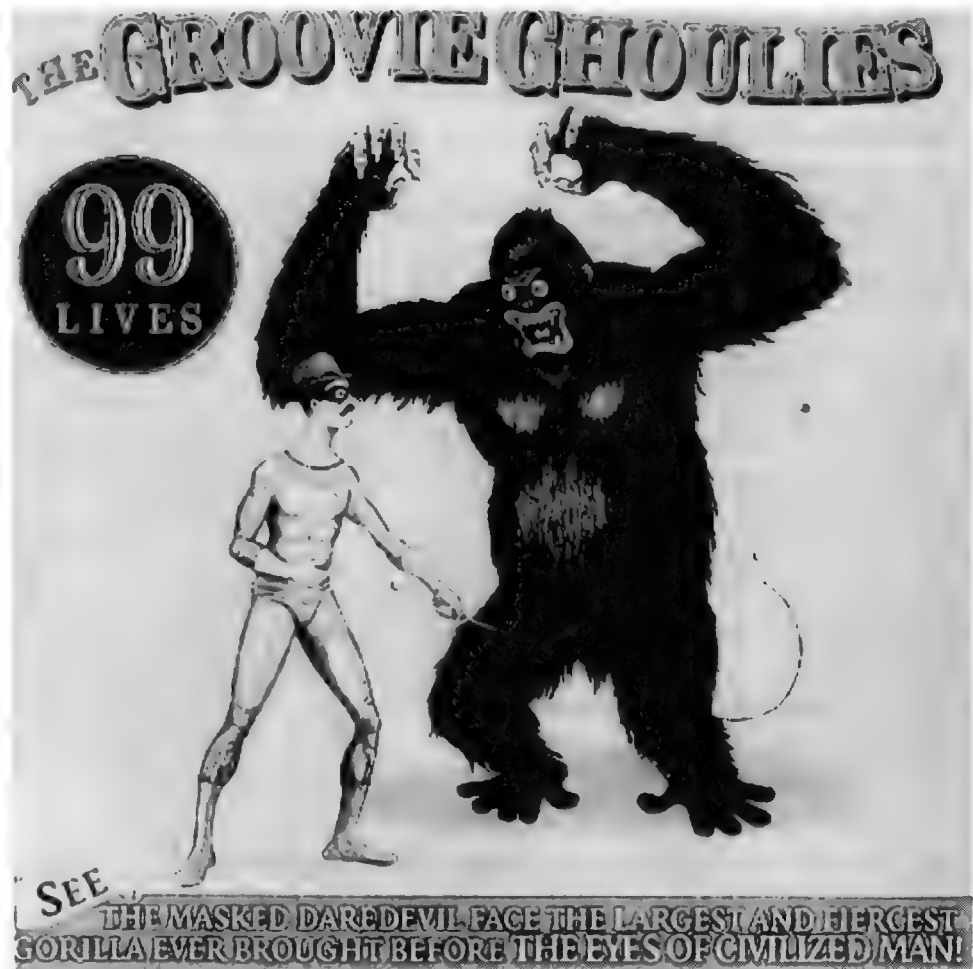
And what made you want to pursue a solo career rather than continuing with the Groovie Ghoulies?

Well, I was married to Roach, the guitar player, and we split up. So that kind of ended the Ghoulies and the Haints. I mean, you can't tour with someone after just having gone through a divorce, especially when it's such a fun and positive band. So it just ended.

And then two more albums were released by

Kepi The Band: *Hanging Out* and *American Gothic*. Why did you want to release the two albums at around the same time — one as a rock album and one acoustic?

It just happened. I had the Ghoulies and I had the Haints, so I was already in that mode of doing those kinds of recordings. Then there was putting together a band. It was kind of like letting people know I'm going to be doing both, probably from now on. So I'm saying, "Here's what I



do, this and this." Then it's, I guess, less mysterious. I don't know. I had six tours last year, and four of them were acoustic. I've really been playing a lot, and all the recordings I've done since are acoustic. It's not that I wanna not make rock records, it's just so easy. And there's a big movement

now, composed of people touring acoustic. Do you know Kevin Seconds?

Right, from 7 Seconds.

Right, and Barry from Avail and John from Drag The River. There's a lot of people out there doing it. It's popular, and I just don't have to do anything – the tours come at me, people wanna put my records out. I love doing it. It's funny, people telling me, "Oh, this is even better than the Ghoulies! We can hear all the words to the songs and blah blah blah." But then there's kids who want to see me rock electric, and that'll happen too, but you just follow the path of least resistance. It's something I love, and it's nice. It's easy, and people want it right now, so I say, "Cool, let's do it!" It's not like selling out or doing something that you're uncomfortable with.

It's convenient and it sounds good.

And it's super fun! I don't think I've had a single bad acoustic show all last year. Europe was perfect and easy, and that's great! It's the best when you don't have to sit there and say to yourself, "Oh God, another show, not tonight, please!"

Maybe you can walk us through the song writing process . . . how do you approach it? The lyrics first? The music first?

It's never the same. Usually it's a couple of lines in a song, and then a melody will come into my head. I have a good digital recorder, but I usually go and grab a cassette and a boom box and yell into the boom box, then I'll have a pilot cassette waiting to be . . . [laughs] . . . transcribed. When it's time to make a record, I'll go and pull it all together. It's never the same. Sometimes you'll go into the studio and just have music. Often it will all just come to me. If I find myself singing in my head over and over for a

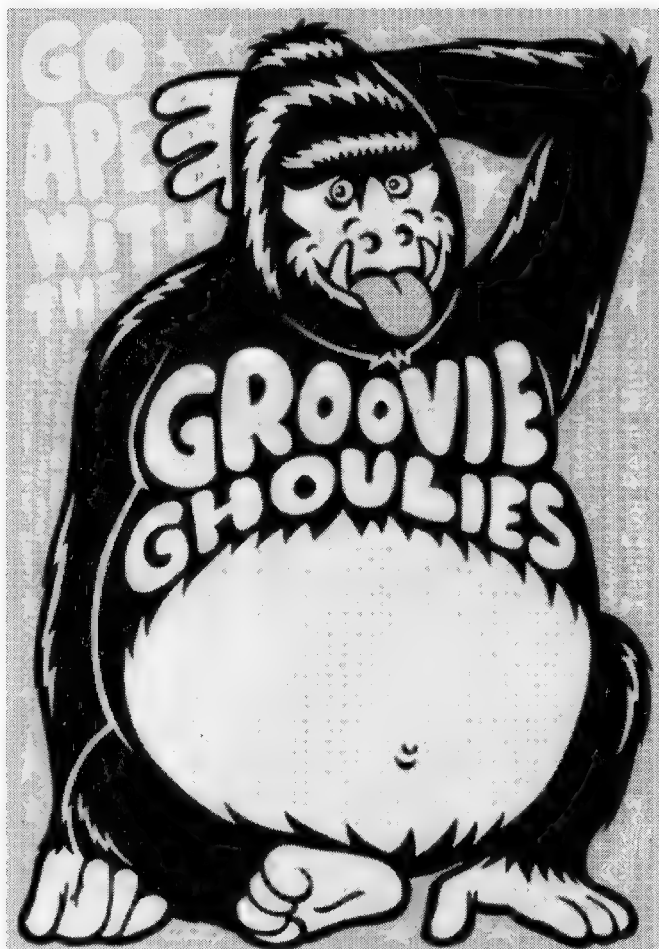
couple of days it usually gets on the record.

Do you write songs while you're on tour, or is it something that usually happens at home?

Usually at home, just because the tour is so hectic. I do sit down and scribble lines and things. Then I'll get home and revisit some of those. I carry a tape recorder or some recording device around with me on tour, but usually it doesn't happen on tour for some reason, I don't know why. You're surrounded by music, and you're playing it, and you're probably just not thinking the new songs through . . .

Would you describe your lyrics, in general, as more of a light matter, that is, as deliberately not delving into political material clearly, or would you say that there's something going on between the lines?

Everybody can get out of it what they want. Or not. My politics are very personal. My personal political beliefs are just about respect. That's pretty much the whole operating system of the universe. If one person respects another, that's it. There's nothing else to worry about. It's the golden rule. So thinking we have to understand international politics and economic theories to get along, well, it's terrible that we all spend so much time fighting about such things. My songs are either little snippets of entertainment, or they try to be slightly life-affirming. There's not a lot of death and suicide, and there's not a lot of politics, but there might be a little something in it now and then. I don't really think so. I try to avoid the insult. Still, you wanna keep all people happy as an entertainer, but sometimes you just can't help but scream. I'll be a smart ass on stage and sometimes make a statement or claim, but it usually doesn't make it on to the songs. For Bob Dylan and The Clash it works, but not for me. With guys like that, their melodies are



so strong and their messages so cleverly put, you can't help but be moved, can't help but agree. Those two were/are also very studious and well-read.

Well, supplying joy and happiness is important, at least, if not more, than giving political insight.

Yeah. [laughs] Thanks. That's kinda what I feel like, that's kinda like my job. If it makes people happy, it makes me happy, so I'm not really losing. Just sing what you know, or what you like, its not like I'm not political, other people just say it better. The same reason I don't try to write Nick Cave songs., because Nick Cave does it best. Everybody has a job, and my job seems to be these little two minute songs in the tradition of Chuuck Berry or Little Richard and things.

DISCOGRAPHY

WORLD CONTACT DAY (1996) LOOKOUT
 APPETITE FOR ADRENOCROME (1996) LOOKOUT
 BORN IN THE BASEMENT (1996) LOOKOUT
 RE-ANIMATION FESTIVAL (1997) LOOKOUT
 FUN IN THE DARK (1997) LOOKOUT
 TRAVELS WITH MY AMP (2000) LOOKOUT
 GO! STORIES (2002) STARDUMB RECORDS
 MONSTER CLUB (2003) SPRINGMAN
 HURT AND ALONE (2004) WITH THE HAINTS ON SPRINGMAN
 99 LIVES (2007) GREEN DOOR
 BATTLE OF WOUNDED HEARTS (2007) WITH THE HAINTS ON GREEN DOOR
 HANGING OUT (2008) AS KEPI GHOULIE ON ASIAN MAN
 AMERICAN GOTHIC (2008) AS KEPI GHOULIE ON ASIAN MAN
 LIFE SENTENCE (2009) AS KEPI CHOULIE ON ASIAN MAN

EPS

RUNNING WITH BIGFOOT (1997) LOOKOUT
 YES DEPRESSION (2001) AS KEPI GHOULIE ON CRIMSON MOON
 FREAKS ON PARADE (2002) STARDUMB
 BERRY'D ALIVE (2007) GREEN DOOR

The Nature of the Beast

An Interview with the One and Only

“Nature Boy” Ric Flair

by David Chappell

As much as “Nature Boy” Ric Flair and all of his many accomplishments belong to the professional wrestling world at large, the fans of Jim Crockett Promotions and Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling to this day still like to claim him as one of our own. And our claim is not without merit. Ric came onto the Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling scene in 1974, and was a fixture in the territory before it transmogrified into a larger Jim Crockett amalgamation of wrestling promotions in the mid-1980s.

As the years have passed, Ric’s legend has grown. But his love for the old Crockett territory, and his fans for him, has remained strong. While not visiting the Mid-Atlantic towns nearly as frequently as he did in the Crockett days, even the relatively rare Ric Flair appearances of the last twenty years or so in the Mid-Atlantic towns turn the respective arenas into Ric Flair love fests. Two of the

most emotion-filled evenings in Ric’s wrestling life in recent years occurred in Greenville, South Carolina, a true hotbed of wrestling during the Crockett years — on September 14, 1998, when he returned to WCW after a bitter absence, and at the WWE RAW tribute to him on May 19, 2003.

To the delight of his legions of fans from the old Mid-Atlantic area, Ric has written and just recently released his autobiography, *Ric Flair: To Be The Man*. True to his roots embedded in the Carolinas and Virginia, Ric has devoted considerable time in the book to his wrestling days in the Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling territory. Ric’s autobiography is a must-read for any Mid-Atlantic fan who remembers when Saturday afternoons with Ric Flair on TV, followed by a close-up view of The Nature Boy the very next week in the local arena, was as routine and sacrosanct as Sunday services for a born-again Baptist.



Brutarian: Good afternoon, Ric. Thank you so much for giving us a little bit of time to talk about your new book, Ric Flair: To Be The Man, and to do a little reminiscing about Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling.

Ric Flair: Hi, David. And thank you, very much.

We think we speak for your many Mid-Atlantic fans in that we're all thrilled at long last to have your autobiography!

Thank you, again. Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling is where I started; that's where it all began. And that's something that will always be part of my life; it's something that I'll always remember.

By our count, there are ten chapters in your book that are devoted strictly to the Mid-Atlantic area and Jim Crockett Promotions. And there are many references to those early days in other parts of the book, as well. Tell us about your start in the Crockett territory.

You know, I was fortunate enough to come there at the right time. I was fortunate enough to be under the tutelage of both Wahoo McDaniel and George Scott. And

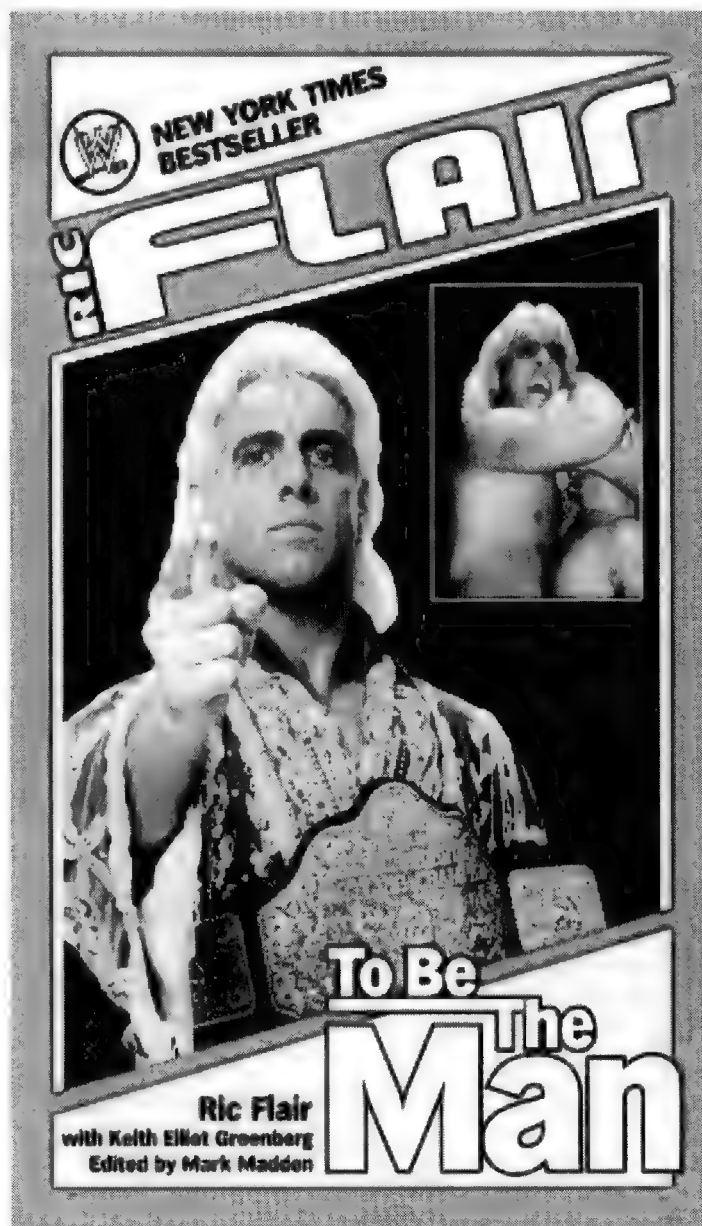
I was fortunate enough to stay for a long time, which was another unusual situation — to stay in one place for a long time and enjoy that level and quality of life.

Back in those days, that was extremely unusual.

A lot of guys at that time, almost everybody, was moving around from territory to territory. I was able to stay in one city, one area, my entire career. So, I was pretty fortunate. And when I look back on it, it was pretty unusual.

When you look back at the Mid-Atlantic years, what jumps out at you? You were certainly maturing as a wrestler; you had many a great match in the ring; you had a lot of good times; you went to a lot of great places and towns; you made many great friends. What stands out?

I think the friendships I developed there. And the fact that the territory was growing, and I was fortunate enough to be part of the branch that it grew on. I became kind of a fixture because, as I said before, I was in the right place at the right time.



When we looked at the acknowledgements section in the book, Ric, we couldn't help but notice how many Mid-Atlantic figures were mentioned there by name. To us, that says a lot about your feelings about the Mid-Atlantic area. George Scott, Wahoo McDaniel, Ricky Steamboat, Bob Caudle, Arn Anderson - all are mentioned by name in the acknowledgements. We'd like you to talk about each one of those persons, if you would.

Of course, I'd be happy to.

The first is George Scott, who you've already mentioned briefly. George was booking the Crockett territory when you first started. In the acknowledgment section, you said George Scott "took a kid who was rough around the edges and molded him into a champion."

Yeah, he really did. I mean, I came in there a green kid. And even though I was fortunate enough to be around Wahoo, who helped me develop as a wrestler, George helped me develop my personality and my persona. George helped me with those things a lot.

We also heard George could be very tough on the wrestlers. Blackjack Mulligan called

him affectionately, a "taskmaster." There's a section in the book where you describe George making you take your back brace off soon after you returned after the 1975 Wilmington, North Carolina plane crash.

Yeah, that's right.

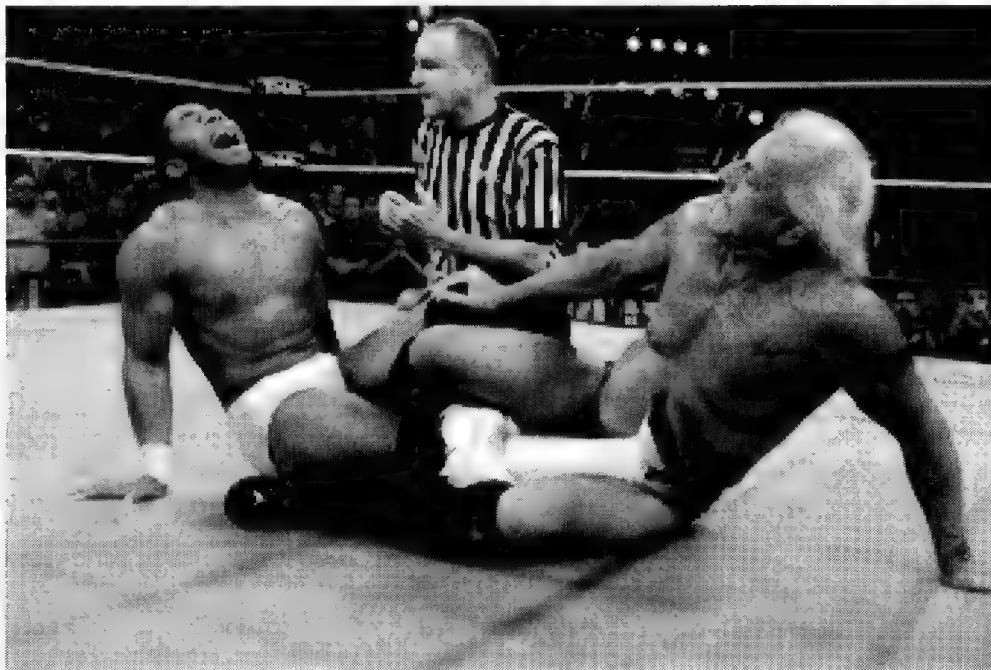
Then you mention later in the book that in 1979 you asked George if you could miss a TV taping at the WRAL studios when your son David was born in Minneapolis. George basically told you that you could go up there, but when you came back you wouldn't have a job.

Well, on that, nobody had time off. We didn't take time off. I just began to realize that George actually made me tough to the business. He helped make me tough, which I had to be. You had to be a pretty tough guy, and pretty insensitive, to survive back then.

We can only imagine . . .

It was a very insensitive, very hard, business. And if you didn't work, you didn't get paid.

A bottom-line business.



If you missed a date, you lost your spot. That's just the way it was. [laughs] You just couldn't call in and take two or three days off.

In the book, while talking about George Scott, you also mention the late Johnny Valentine. He was an early partner of yours. What a tough guy in the ring he was.

Yeah, Johnny was a good guy. Johnny was

a strange guy, to be honest. I can't say that I didn't learn a little bit from him, because I did. But his style was totally different from what I wanted to do.

Totally mat-based, that's for sure!

Yeah, his style didn't work with anything I really wanted to do. I came into the business watching Ray Stevens and Pat Patterson, [Nick] Bockwinkel, and Red Bastien — and all of a sudden I was down there watching John do his thing. I really liked the Andersons' style.

Really?

Yeah, that worked a lot better for me than John's did. But, I was with John then, and it worked out good. Because of the fact that I was a young guy, and he was older and more experienced. It's kind of like what I'm doing now with Randy [Orton] and Dave [Batista], you know, in Evolution.

That's right, in a lot of ways you have come full-circle in your career now with the WWE.

A little similar, in some ways. But, I just wasn't that enamored with Johnny's style of work. I mean, I appreciated how hard he and Wahoo fought. And they did fight; it was a fight, not a wrestling match.

Oh boy, those were brutal!

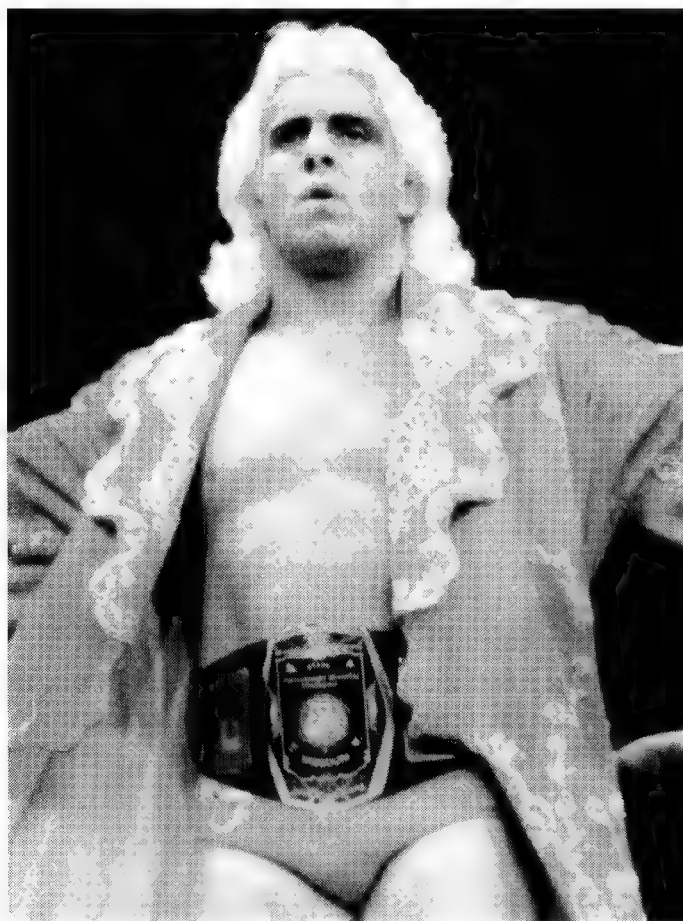
I appreciated all that, but I told myself that I needed to be a more colorful and more flamboyant guy that flew around a little more than Johnny did. I didn't believe in ANY kind of bumps at all; he didn't like going off his feet.

With John, you pretty much got toe-to-toe slugfests.

Yeah, you really did.

We all remember that Valentine was in the

plane with you that went down in Wilmington in October of 1975. Of course, Valentine was



never able to wrestle again after that. There's a whole chapter in the book devoted to the plane crash. It's a riveting part of the book, and makes the reader feel that he or she is right there in the plane with you. That had to be terrifying beyond anything imaginable.

Thank you. It was a really harrowing experience, a tough deal.

Another wrestler you mention by name in your acknowledgment section is the late Wahoo McDaniel. And, of course, you've already mentioned him several times this afternoon. What was impressive and somewhat surprising was how close you were to him; it went far beyond what we fans saw and knew in the 70s.

Yes, that's most definitely the truth.

Please share some of your thoughts about the “Chief” with us. One of your best stories in the book concerns Wahoo racing into the hospital in Wilmington to check on you after the 1975 plane crash, and the hospital personnel trying to restrain him because you two were in a heated feud then! They thought Wahoo had come to the hospital to finish you off!

Yeah, exactly, that’s how seriously they took it back then. Wahoo was that kind of a guy; just a stand up guy. He didn’t take no shit from anybody. And he lived that way every minute of his life. [laughs] He didn’t take shit from anybody, not the wrestlers, the wrestling promoters, women, wives, girlfriends . . .

It didn’t matter, no one was immune!

You know, Wahoo was married six times. If he didn’t like something his wife was saying, he didn’t let the door hit her on the ass on the way out! He didn’t care. When he got up in the morning, he was gonna play golf or he was gonna fish. He would do whatever he was doing that afternoon, and then he’d leave and go to work, and then he was gonna drink that night, and come home late. He didn’t care! [laughs] But, I mean, he was one of the most competitive people I’ve ever known in my life . . .

Interesting!

He had to be the best at everything he ever did. He was a scratch golfer, and if they did that kind of stuff back then, a world class bass fisherman. He loved all that stuff, you know what I mean?

Yes, on some of his Mid-Atlantic interviews his love of golf and fishing would definitely come out at times.

He slept on a real bear rug, and if you stayed in his apartment or his house, it had to be sixty degrees. It was brutal! He was just a real Jeremiah Johnson.

**Wahoo McDaniel — the “Mountain Man!”
Amazing!**

Yes, he really was.

Another wrestler you mention in the book’s acknowledgements, and a great competitor in the ring, was Ricky Steamboat. Interesting to learn that you were actually the one that approached George Scott and pushed to start that program with Ricky in 1977. And we all know how phenomenal that turned out!

And you know, the older guys, including Wahoo, weren’t too excited about [Steamboat] coming along!

We’ve always been curious about that. Then again, we can sort of see that being the case.

Yeah, it was.

In the book, you indicate that Steamboat was the best “good guy” you ever wrestled. And, of course, Steamboat stayed a good guy his entire career.

In my entire life, he was. He was fabulous.

And Steamboat ended up being your first tag team partner when you turned into a good guy yourself in 1979. Talk about a “Dream Team” pairing!

Oh yeah, he was off the charts.

Let’s talk about Mid-Atlantic announcer Bob Caudle. You said the “golden voices” of Bob Caudle, along with Gordon Solie and current WWE announcer Jim Ross, “helped provide the soundtrack of my life.”

Yes, absolutely.

Your mention of Bob Caudle had us thinking about all the great Mid-Atlantic television angles that took place at the WRAL studios in Raleigh, North Carolina, or wherever you all were taping TV. A couple of great ones are

mentioned in the book. One is from 1978, when you suckered Steamboat in the ring and rubbed his face raw on the mat and floor. Then he comes back on another show and tears your clothes off! You also mentioned the angle from early 1981 where Roddy Piper comes out and

it up and stomped on it. And a little later on, I was wrestling somebody and Mulligan comes out wearing my robe, and he tore up my robe in front of me . . .

That was an unforgettable Mid-Atlantic moment!



And then I put a bounty out on Mulligan. I left for Japan, and when I came back we were selling out everywhere! [laughing]

And of course back then, everything played off the weekly television show in your market. And that got the fans out to their local arena. So those TV angles involving the hat and the robe were really, really important then. There was hardly any cable tv and certainly no satellite dishes in those days. And Pay Per View events were years off.

Exactly. Oh yeah, they were big-time.

You refer to Arn Anderson as your "friend for life."

presents you with the NWA TV Title as a sort of consolation prize after he's beaten you for the U.S. Title. You turn the interview around on him, exposing his winning the U.S. belt from you utilizing a foreign object!

[Flair laughing]

Any other Mid-Atlantic television memories stand out to you?

We did a lot of great stuff at WRAL. The angle with Blackjack Mulligan was huge. That's where I took his cowboy hat that Waylon Jennings had given him and tore

Arn came in at the tail end of the Mid-Atlantic promotion and has been closely associated with you through Crockett, WCW, and now to the present with World Wrestling Entertainment, hasn't he?

Arn came in during 1985 and was with me there for a lot of the Crockett days.

That was around the time that the Four Horsemen came into being. That time period is also well chronicled in the book. It certainly sounds like things with the Horsemen were every bit as wild as what you all were always telling us about on TV!

[laughing] Yeah, they were! We really had a lot of fun.

As the years go on, the book describes the disintegration of Jim Crockett Promotions in the late 1980s in a lot of detail. For most Mid-Atlantic fans, that portion of your book will be a fascinating but sad read. You describe how your relationship with Jimmy Crockett, Jr. became more distant, and that there were really two opposing camps with Jimmy Crockett and Dusty [Rhodes] on one side, and you and David, Jackie, and Frances Crockett on the other.

Yes, exactly!

So, really, how did it all go down?



Well, you know, it went down exactly the way that I wrote it! I tell you, to this day, I don't know how Jimmy and I drifted apart. He went from being my best friend, a guy that I thought the world of, to a guy that I just couldn't talk to. He was out of control. He was convinced that they could go to Dallas where they lost a fortune. And make movies. You know, that story is very similar to the WCW story later in the book.

How so?

Well, not similar as to the way Jimmy treated me, of course. Jimmy Crockett never treated me badly at all. But Jimmy and Dusty had an obsession with trying to compete with Vince McMahon, and it overshadowed the importance of making the territory do well. They were so consumed with becoming a national commodity that they forgot about their back yard. They spent money they didn't have, continuously, which is very similar to the WCW story.

And it sounded like, by that time, that Jimmy would only listen to Dusty?

No matter how many of us told Jimmy that they were spending too much money, it didn't matter . . .

He didn't want to hear it.

Right. And we kept telling him he should stay east of the Mississippi and not go west of the Mississippi. If he had done that, he would have stayed in business. But the minute we went west, we started losing big money.

And that situation is addressed in depth in the book.

[laughs] And you know who speaks out very candidly about it, is David [Crockett]! David verifies everything I'm saying.

He does, and in fact David Crockett is quoted



throughout the book. I thought his insight on a lot of subjects contributed significantly to the bio.

Don't think that David didn't seize the opportunity to tell Dusty and Jimmy what he thinks of them . . . until I read David's quotes, I didn't realize how harsh he'd been either. He's harder on them than I am! And I'm not really hard on them. The things that I'm talking about there probably hurt me more than the guys that are reading it now.

Like any good book, Ric, yours is full of things that the reader would never know about unless you made the point of bringing them out and highlighting them for us. Just a couple come off of the top of my head. Like this, just to take one example: Who would have ever known that Art Nelson was the wrestler that taught you the importance of bleeding during a match?

[laughs]

Or that Tim Woods saved Mid-Atlantic Wrestling

by his actions after the plane crash?

And he never got paid a dime.

He just went in there and gutted it out.

That's right.

Certainly, the book is illustrative of how important your family is to you.

Yes . . . very much!

And as fans, we knew virtually nothing about your family during the Mid-Atlantic years.

I know.

But you do talk extensively about you and Blackjack Mulligan, one of your best friends, buying the Knoxville territory in 1981 and it failing. After that your relationship with Blackjack was never quite the same . . . and that to this day you miss Blackjack . . .

I just never saw Jack for so long, you know? It's funny, because I know I've been in towns and he's been there, but I got the impression he was just pretty much through with the business. Let me tell you, Jack Mulligan and I — believe me — I wish I could have written about him and I all day long. Jack was the kind of guy -- he was just so powerful, personality-wise and in every way. I could have told more stories. I could talk about Jack all day long. We became best friends; we were neighbors. We did everything there was to do. Then all of a sudden, you know, some of the problems took place, which I didn't touch on a lot. It hurt me that a guy that was such a big part of my life . . . was gone. You know what I mean?

I'm sure that had to be extremely tough.

I had to go my way, and he had to go his, you know what I mean?

Just sort of that fork in the road . . .

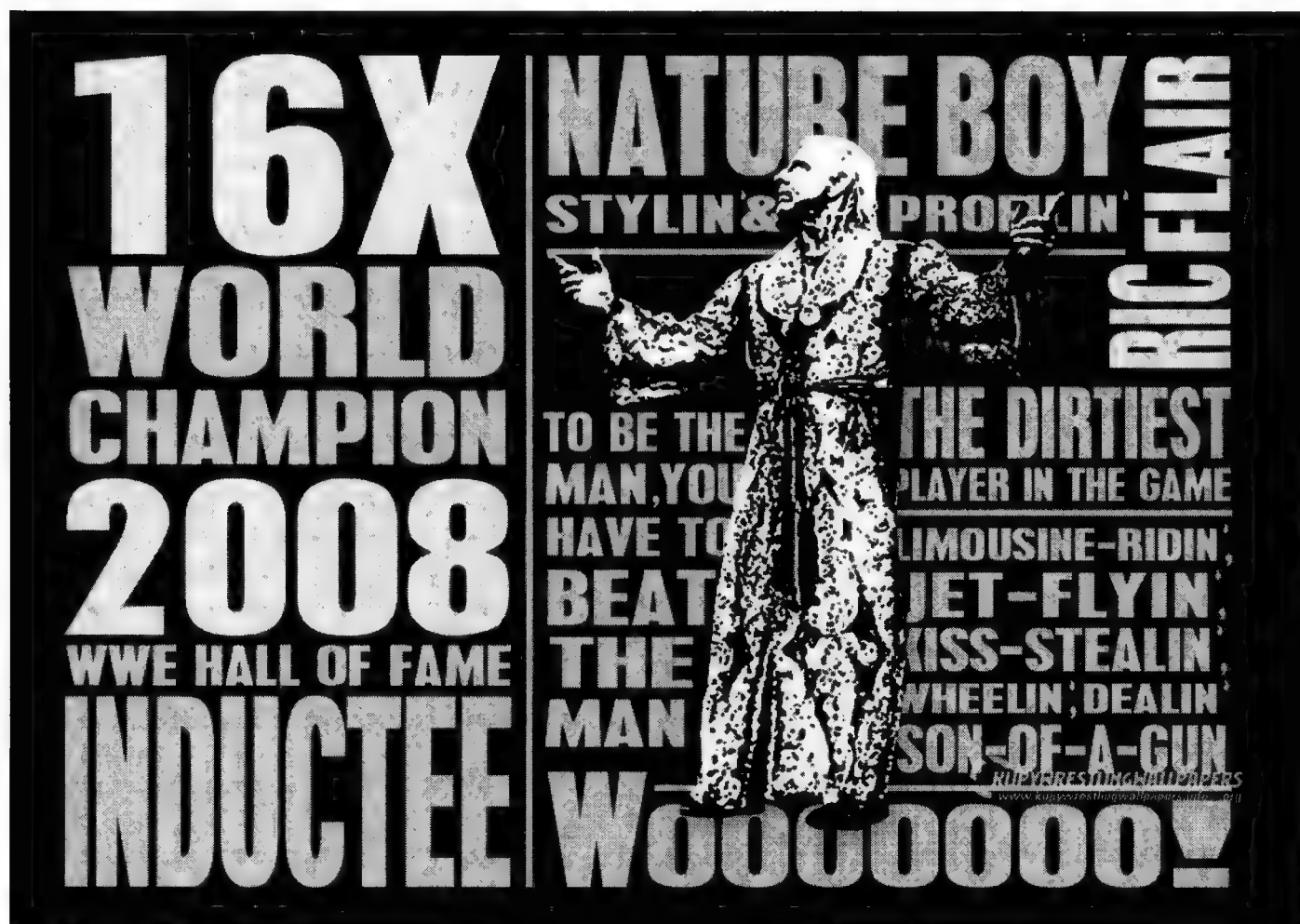
Yes . . . and there were never any words between us, nothing like that. He and I had nothing but fun! I could write some fabulous stories about him!

Why did you write the autobiography?

Actually, I didn't really want to do it; they put a lot of pressure on me to do it.

Oh, really?

Yep. And then they put even more pressure on me, after I expressed reservations, to be honest.



We think it's important to say here that the book covers your whole life and career, and goes far beyond the Mid-Atlantic territory. And you don't pull any punches on a number of people you've dealt with over the years.

There are no punches to pull. It's nothing I wouldn't, and haven't, said to them. And the thing of it is, it's all documented. It's not just my opinion.

A lot of people will be very surprised by much of what you write towards the end of the book, especially concerning your having to endure the dying days of WCW and everything that was going on with that. You were having a real crisis of self-doubt.

Yes, self-confidence.

But was it tough writing about those down times in the book?

It was, because it was a very difficult period of my life. But you know what, the problem is that when I look at people that have problems in life — I think of people that have children that are handicapped, people that have been in car wrecks and are paralyzed. There's a difference between having a hard time in life, and having some issues. Does that make sense?

Without a doubt. Sometimes we all have to keep things in perspective.

I've had issues. But my life has never been hard from the standpoint that I've never lost a child; I've never had one of my children get real sick. You know, I had some rough times with my parents, but they were in their 80s. Those things happen at that age. I don't want anybody to think that I ever had a tough time, you know? I had some issues that I had a hard time dealing with, but in the realm of my life in terms of it ever being BAD, compared to people that really have problems, that's not what I was trying to say in the book.

Yes, your book, in its essence, is a book about wrestling.

I was merely telling wrestling stories. And telling about some of the things that I went through, both as a performer and as a person. And some of the things that got under my skin, which in a lot of cases I should have dealt with differently. If I'm mad at anybody about those things, I'm mad at myself. Towards the end with WCW, I just didn't want to go through another lawsuit, spending more money on attorneys. I mean, otherwise, I would have left WCW long before.

This is when Eric Bischoff fired you in 1998 for breach of contract, allegedly for your going to your son Reid's AAU wrestling tournament. And as you said in the book, at that point you didn't even have a contract with WCW! And then you counter sued him, but later you finally decided to settle it.

I know they would have gone out of their way to make my life miserable . . . again. If I had been smart, really smart, and not wanted back in the business — like I said in the book — I should have kept my lawsuit in place and I would have been rich. Rich beyond belief.

Well, Ric, you were flat out in a tough position there. Any decision you made would probably have had some downsides for you.

But resolving it any other way would have been a terrible way to end up my career. Being in a huge lawsuit with Time-Warner over somebody that treated me like shit, I mean, that would have been hardly the way, the last way, anybody would have wanted to end up their career. You know what I mean?

Surely, that would have undoubtedly been even worse on you. Still, It's great to read about how things have been so much more positive for you since you returned to WWE after WCW bit the

dust in 2001.

Yeah, that's entirely true. I had no idea that I still had that kind of respect from those kind of people. I had no idea that I had that kind of rapport with people. I mean, when somebody has convinced you that you're not worth anything to anybody anymore, and they spend a lot of time doing it, you start believing it yourself. Does that make sense?

Of course. And it's very clear from the book that Bischoff and those later years in WCW took quite a toll on you. Still, for all of us fans who always think of Ric Flair as the epitome of self-confidence, it's pretty amazing to now know that you battled that significant period of self-doubt. But I think it just goes to show that we're all human, even Ric Flair!

Like I wrote in the book, the first time I talked to Vince about that I'm sure they were going, "Wha???"

Well, I think that's one of the things that makes the book so fascinating. Because people are going to see a side of you that they never knew existed, and very few people at the time knew about.

Well, yes, and it's the truth. I'm not sure how it will all play out. None of this was written to hurt anybody's feelings.

You mean your book as a whole?

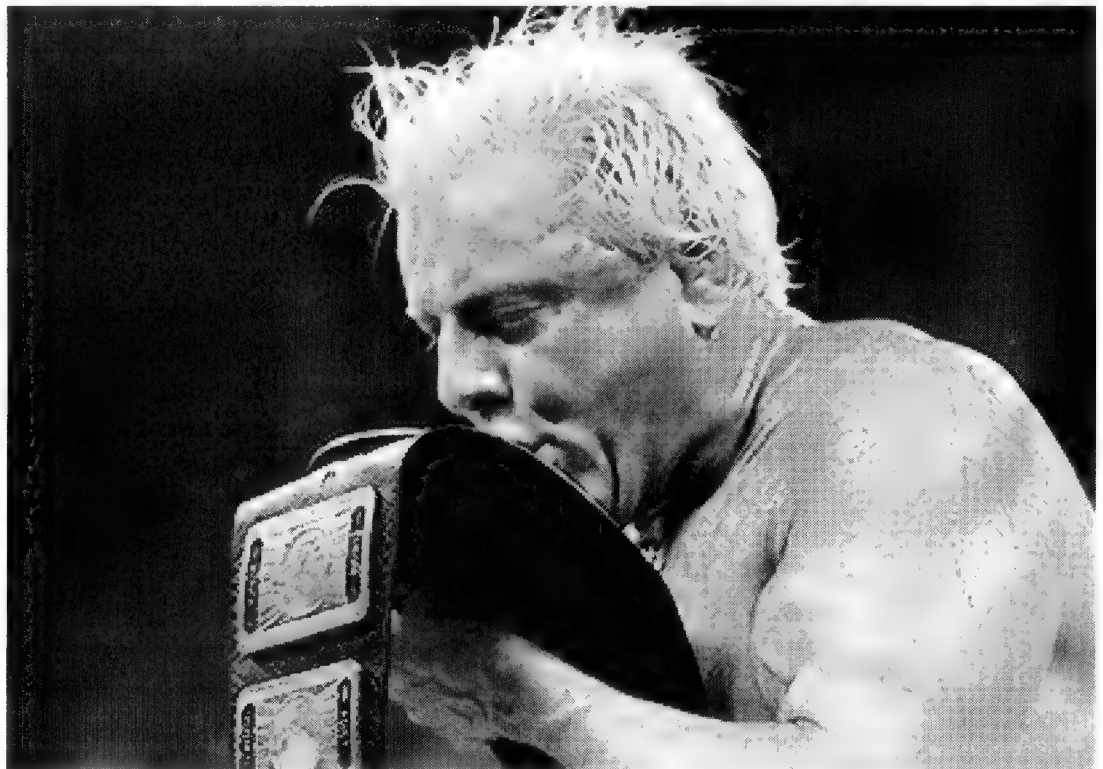
Yes. Anybody I said something about, first said something about me. And if they're mad about it, then they're a hypocrite. Those people had no problem saying things about me.

That's right, in the book your comments are almost always in direct response to what someone has already said about you.

Like the stuff with Hulk Hogan. You know Hogan and I, well, let's just say the best thing about Hogan and me is that we agree to disagree. And Hulk, I make no bones about Hulk Hogan — he always took care of himself. I mean, that's always the way he operated.

No doubt about that.

He was that way, always has been . . . and I'm sure he'll continue to be that way. But he doesn't care! That's the difference between Hogan and me. When I leave, I'd rather have the respect of and the



relationships I have with all these people, from the McMahons to the wrestlers. And have that level of respect and self-esteem that I have for the conversation I'm having with you right now. Rather than walking out the door, you know, angry or mad or upset over a payoff, or an amount of money, or a position, or a match I had to win or lose. It isn't worth that to me.

The differences between you and Hogan are striking, to say the least.

Again, it isn't worth it. That's what I was trying to say. But, it wasn't that I was knocking Hulk. He's a businessman, and wrestling comes second to him.

What really seems to have soured you on Hogan was the bit where Hogan took on your son David as part of an NWO angle in WCW during 1999, and legitimately whipped the shit out of him with a belt. He just went too far with it. You were handcuffed to the ring ropes as part of the angle and had to watch it.

Yeah, and anybody that watched that knows that, too. And I couldn't even say anything to Hogan after that. You'd be surprised

how that would translate into, "Oh, you're whining for your kid."

Pressing it too hard probably would have made things even worse for David.

Exactly.

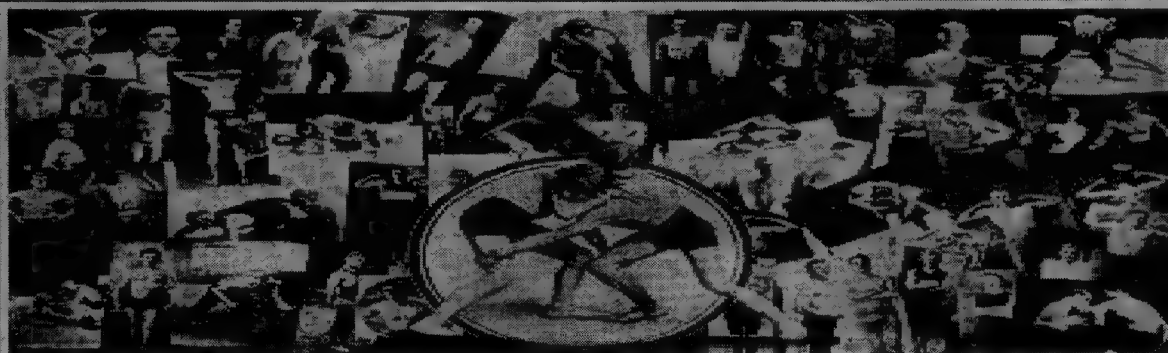
Well Ric, we know we need to wrap this up soon, you have another interview scheduled shortly. But I did want to ask you if you have any book signings lined up in Virginia and the Carolinas, that is, the Mid-Atlantic area!

[laughs] Can I tell you something?

Of course.

[laughs] This is a sad thing, but about half of the WWE staff here doesn't understand who I am. Richmond, Norfolk, Charlotte, Columbia, Greenville, Charleston, Greensboro, Charleston, West Virginia - the staff doesn't know who I am! Instead of having me in those towns, they have me going off to Podunk, Rhode Island or somewhere next week! We could sell 100,000 books in Richmond if I go there. In one day! I keep trying to tell them that!

November, 1999



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The X-File (#2)

Monsters Among Us

by Michael Varhola

Some years back, during a trip to Turkey, I spent the afternoon studying a collection of ancient Assyrian artifacts in a wing of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul and, while there, had an epiphany. Whether epiphanies reveal any sort of objective truth is a matter that can be debated, but whether the people having them tend to be convinced of their veracity generally cannot, and I have been moved by mine to this day.

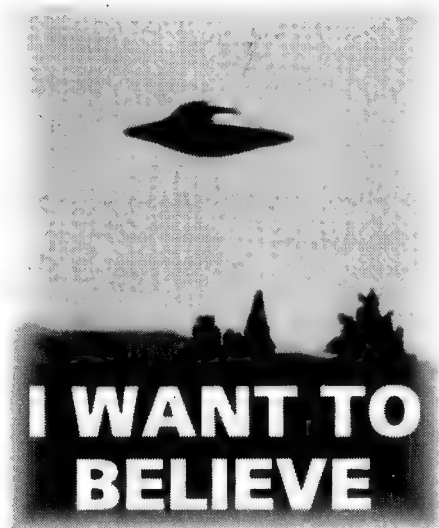
The thing that caught my attention was a number of life-sized stone statues of what, by all accounts, were saber-toothed tigers. Saber-toothed tigers. Beasts of this sort are supposed to have gone extinct some 11,000 years ago, after having walked the Earth in some form for a stunning 42 million years. While the 7,000 years between their disappearance and the rise of Assyria might seem quite profound in human terms, they are nonetheless insignificant when compared to the longevity of the species in question.

What struck me so clearly that day at the ancient palace on the shores of the Sea of Marmara was that the artisans who had sculpted these likenesses had done so from direct observation, firsthand reports, or, at the outside, descriptions from legends passed down from earlier generations.

One could certainly make the argument that these megalithic monstrosities were simply carved from imagination but I don't buy that. When the artists of this tradition did delve into the fantastic, they incorporated elements like wings, scales, and horns to their chimeras — they did not painstakingly reproduce in gleaming black basalt prehistoric animals that they could have had no knowledge of if the generally-accepted timelines are correct.

It is not, in fact, unreasonable to think that creatures that lived for untold millions of years might, in fact, have been almost entirely extirpated from the world except for small populations that survived in the wildest and most remote areas, being encountered in their isolated redoubts by adventurous humans or periodically venturing forth from them.

For those who "want to believe," there are numerous other examples from antiquity that suggest the veil between history and prehistory is a porous and irregular one that has been pierced many times. The legends of Hercules are one of my favorite collective examples. In many of these stories, the ideal man is pitted against creatures far larger and more powerful than the normal types of the kind. It does not take much of a reading between the lines to see these monsters as the remnants of an archaic



age that, in the twilight of their existence, periodically wander down from the rugged mountain lands of the Mediterranean to menace the early settlements of humanity.

As a result of these contemplations, I have gradually come to be much more inclined to believe credible reports of extinct creatures, supposedly mythological beasts, and various

have become quite well known. These include quintessential exemplars like Bigfoot in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, the Loch Ness Monster in Scotland, and the Jersey Devil in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. And the hilly region of central Texas where I currently live is especially rife with sightings of all sorts of strange things.

One of the first I heard about, in early 2009,



A creature identified as a chupacabra in the town of Blanco, Texas, and photographed by the author for the local weekly newspaper.

other sorts of cryptids (i.e., creatures whose existence has been suggested but which are generally regarded as fantastic, especially by the mainstream scientific community).

Just about every area has its own indigenous cryptozoological creatures, some of which

was an incident that happened about a year earlier, when a friend of mine spotted what he believed to be a pair of red wolves trotting across the road not far from my house. Beyond their size, red wolves are distinct from either coyotes or gray wolves in a number of ways, and not easily confused with either. At one



point, packs of these predators roamed the southeastern United States from Texas to Florida. They thrived from the Ice Age right up into modern times, but their numbers began to wane dramatically after widespread settlement of the area began and, in 1980, the federal government declared them to be extinct in the wild.

Every few months or so I also hear reports about a panther — some say black, some otherwise — that people have spotted near their homes, and which many believe lives in a nearby ravine called the Devil's Hollow. I probably spend more time than anyone else in this deep, rugged, overgrown canyon, which

extends in one direction to the Guadalupe River and in the other for miles up into the hills, and have not yet seen any sign of this big cat . . . but keep my eye out for it.

Sometimes, however, Texas Hill Country seems like a virtual lost world, and it is certainly possible for all sorts of things to live in an area so large, rugged, and relatively sparsely populated. Within just a one-mile radius of where I live, there are densely-wooded valleys-within-valleys only rarely visited by people, at least one large hidden ravine beyond the aforementioned one, and dozens of small caves, overhangs, and other forms of natural shelter. A shy and clever

creature that spent most of its time in such places, and traveled beyond them via routes like ravines and culverts underneath highways, might remain largely undetected indefinitely. And there are more than enough white-tailed deer and other game animals to meet the needs of any small predator populations.

A legend that has recently become widespread throughout Texas, however, and gone beyond the hidden places of Hill Country, is that of the chupacabra. Anytime Texans bump into something these days that they can't identify right away, someone is likely to claim that it is the legendary creature "goat sucker." In one recent incident, local news affiliates in the Dallas area rushed to cover the story of a dead creature discovered at a golf course and identified initially as a chupacabra — and thereafter as a hairless, mange-ridden raccoon. This legendary creature has nonetheless

become so popular that the north Texas town of Runaway Bay has adopted it as its mascot.

So, there may be more running around out there than you might expect — and some of it might be closer than you think.

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Headlights peeled the darkness away from a roadside sign, and Abe read it aloud as the car rocketed past.

Tom knew if he pushed the issue about the sign, he'd be asking for a fight.

School for the Dead

BY CULLEN BUNN

"School for the Dead."

"Come again?" Eyes glassy from too many miles behind the wheel, Tom glanced at his passenger.

"That sign back there." Abe jerked a thumb towards the stretch of highway vanishing into the night behind them. "It said 'Midway County School for the Dead.'"

"Probably said 'School for the Deaf' or something." Tom craned his neck and looked in the rearview. "You know, one of them places where they teach retards who can't hear so good. You must have read it wrong."

"I can read just fine," Abe slouched down in the seat, arms crossed, jaw set in stubborn determination. "I'm just telling you what it said."

"School for the Dead." Tom coughed out a laugh. "Maybe we should get your brain enrolled."

The radio picked up nothing but static along this stretch of blacktop, and they rode in silence for a couple of minutes. The '76 Impala jostled and rattled, and every dimple in the pavement felt like a gaping pothole. Dashboard gauges illuminated the cab in an eerie blue-green wash.

Many miles had passed since either of them had slept in a decent bed, and the spoils of the their last several meals – Moon Pie wrappers and Chili-Cheese Fritos bags – littered the floorboard. They were both cranky as limp-dick badgers. Better to let the matter drop than risk an argument.

No such luck.

"That's what it said," Abe said at long last. "I didn't put the sign there."

Tom's blood rushed to his head like whitewater rapids. "Why in the world would there be a school for the dead? The dead? That don't make a lick of sense."

Tires screeched as Tom hit the brakes. Abe, not wearing his seatbelt, lurched forward and braced himself with one hand on the dash. Tom spun the steering wheel and pulled a u-turn.

"We're gonna see for ourselves what that sign says, and if you don't apologize when you see I'm right, I'm gonna leave your sorry ass on the side of the road, and you can catch a ride with one of those deaf kids."

"Dead," Abe said.

Tom bit his tongue and pressed the gas.



Steve Griffin 2010

Tom wanted nothing more than to find a Motel Six and bed down for the night. Maybe catch a movie. There always seemed to be one of them horror pictures on the tube at this hour. But he knew he'd never be able to sleep peacefully letting Abe think he was in the right about something so obviously wrong. I'll teach the pig-headed sonovabitch a lesson, he thought.

Abe was a failed Old Order Mennonite – failed because of his love for Jack Daniels, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Big Macs – and Tom was failed at just about everything worthwhile he ever put his mind to. They'd been best friends ever since meeting during a barroom brawl that put two mouthy frat boys in the hospital and a third into an early grave. Now they lived wherever the road took them. They answered to no one, and sought adventure around every bend.

And they got on each other's last nerve every chance they got.

Pig-headed sonovabitch, Tom thought again.

Trees flanked the road. This time of night a deer might bound across the lanes at any moment, and a driver either drove carefully or risked a totaled car. Tom wasn't in the mood for caution, though, and he urged the trembling MPH needle towards the triple digits. Fallen leaves spun in whirlwinds in the glowing red wake of the car. Mile markers slipped into the headlights' beams and back into shadow as the car drew closer to the object of contention.

"You're gonna miss it," Abe warned.

"I wouldn't miss the chance to see you eat crow for all the rib-tips in Parker's Barbeque."

Up ahead, a dirt road punched a hole in the trees on the left-hand side. A metal sign painted brown and decorated with white reflective letters stood next to the track. The car heaved again as Tom braked and pulled off

the main stretch. Gravel clicked and clattered along the car's underbelly.

The stark words MIDWAY COUNTY SCHOOL FOR THE DEAD glowed in the high beams.

"Must be some kind of misprint or something," Tom grumbled.

"Probably so," Abe said, "but that doesn't change the fact that I was right and you, you cantankerous so-and-so, were wrong."

Tom flexed his fingers on the steering wheel, then set the car to idling down the shadowy path.

"What are you doing?" Abe asked.

"I want to see this place for myself." Gravel rasped beneath the tires.

"It's after midnight." Abe pointed to the clock. "What if it's some kind of boarding school? You're gonna wake up a bunch of kids."

Tom snorted. "Hell, whether they're deaf or dead, it ain't like they can hear us."

"They'll see the headlights."

Tom sneered at him and flipped the lights off, and the car rolled on, the path lit only by the pall of the moon.

"You are one contrary bastard," Abe said.

A quarter mile or so down the path, the remains of an ornate metal gateway partially blocked further passage. One of the gates leaned catawampus from the hinges. The other was overgrown with climbing vines, now dry and gray and brittle. Beyond, a massive building loomed from the darkness.

"Don't look like no school I've ever seen," Abe said. "Looks more like a nuthouse. Quiet as a

ghost town, though, like it's been closed for a long time."

"Wait a minute – " Tom leaned forward and squinted at the house. A light flickered through one of the building's lower windows.

"Maybe it ain't empty after all," Abe said.

Cutting the engine, Tom yanked the jangling set of keys from the ignition and stepped out of the car.

"Tell me you ain't going up there," Abe said.
"Let's get back on the road and find someplace to crash."

Slipping between the gates, Tom continued on foot towards the school.

Abe unrolled the passenger side window and stuck his head out. "You're trespassing. You know that, right? Somebody's gonna blow your nuts off with a shotgun, and they're gonna be in their rights to do it, too."

"Hush up. You're loud enough to wake the deaf. Just wait in the car for a minute if you're getting cold panties. I'll be right back."

Abe's head disappeared into the car again. Tom couldn't see his friend through the dark windshield, but he could feel his glare boring into his skull like a two-inch drill bit. He considered returning to the car, but this was, after all, why the two of them had set off together in the first place – to seek adventure, just like the A-Team or BJ McKay and his best friend Bear. Now, Tom thought, after all the bar fights, the odd jobs, and the sleazy truck stop bimbos, he wasn't going to let a gothic building and some ghostly light scare him off.

Once, the grounds might have been covered with lush gardens and hedges, but now tangled messes of arid weeds crawled across the lawn. A few wooden benches, painted white

but flaking and peeling from years of neglect and weather, surrounded a cement fountain brimming with stagnant muck. Run-off from overfull rain gutters streaked down the sides of the building in mottled patches.

Tom glimpsed a tiny red light winking at him from the shadows. A security camera, he realized, tucked away in the bushes, oscillating from left to right, recording his every move. He saw another tell-tale red light a little closer to the house. And another on the other side of the yard. Now that he was looking for them, he spotted cameras all over the place.

He might have high-tailed it back to the car . . . if not for the scream.

Coming from the building.

Distant, quiet, but a scream for sure.

The light beyond the window brightened, then faded, and brightened again in an almost strobing effect. Creeping closer, Tom crouched beneath the sill. He heard muffled voices coming from within, a groaning sound, and a woman's cry. His heartbeat quickened, gooseflesh blazed across the back of his arms, and he rose to peek inside.

A hand grabbed his shoulder, and Tom whirled around, slapping both hands over his mouth to suppress a scream.

"Little jumpy?" Abe asked.

Tom toughened up right quick. "What the hell are you doing sneaking up on me? You're lucky I didn't slug you. You near about gave me a heart attack."

"Lay off the cheeseburgers and onion rings," Abe said, "and you wouldn't worry about your heart so much."

"That right? You earn your doctor's papers on

that Mennonite farm?"

"Don't need papers to know those rings make you fart something awful."

"My farts smell like petunias," Tom said.
"Thought you wanted to wait in the car, anyway."

"Reckon the idea of you getting into trouble without me just didn't sit right."

"Well, we may have found a whole mess of trouble, old son. Listen."

Abe's face blanched now that he heard a gurgling cry of pain coming from within. A chainsaw roared. Tom's eyes grew wide and his mouth dropped open. Abe's expression mirrored his own. A thought passed between them. Whatever awful things awaited, they would face them together. They looked through the window.

Peering down into a sunken room, they realized the flickering light and the horrific sounds came from a big screen TV standing along the far wall of the room. On screen, a screaming woman cowered behind a blood-covered madman brandishing a chainsaw like a broadsword as he ripped through scores of desiccated, undead creatures. Bright red fake blood gouted across the camera lens and dripped down in an oozing sheet, obscuring the scene for only a couple of seconds before the saw-wielding hero once again appeared, wading through a sea of zombies.

Abe breathed a sigh of relief. "Break out the popcorn, huh?"

A dozen or so figures, all seated in cramped schoolhouse-style desks, faced the television, but from the window Tom only saw them from behind, the television's glow silhouetting them in the darkened chamber. The group didn't move, didn't fidget in the uncomfortable seats.

They only watched the movie intently.

The scene ended, and the lights went up. Still, none of the figures moved from their seats. A whip of a man walked across the room. He wore a long white doctor's jacket over jeans and a black Evil Dead tee shirt. As he ejected one tape from a VCR atop the television and put the new one in, he talked to himself or to the seated figures. If he was addressing the audience, though, they didn't react.

Another horror movie started up, this one featuring a S.W.A.T. officer sharp-shooting zombies in the brain pan.

Now Tom saw that the seated figures were dressed in filthy rags, and that their skin was so pallid it was almost gray, and that their hair was limp and dry.

"Oh shit!" said Abe, dropping away from the window.

Tom saw the young doctor – if he was a doctor – striding out of the room, the tail of his white lab coat flapping behind him.

"He saw us!" Abe said. "Let's get out of here!"

They nearly tripped all over each other trying to make a getaway. But before they scrambled more than a few yards away, the front doors swung open. A sliver of weak light spilled across the yard. The man in the lab coat stepped onto the front stoop.

"May I help you, gentlemen?"

Tom stopped in his tracks, Abe bumping into him from behind. No sense in running, he thought, because their faces were already on camera. He faced the man and blurted the first excuse that popped into his head.

"Our car broke down, and we saw your sign along the highway. Wondered if we might use

your phone.”

“My phone.” The young man pursed his lips and looked off towards the road in the direction of the gates, where the car waited in darkness. His expression didn’t betray whether or not he believed the story. “Of course. Of course. Come in.”

Tom and Abe looked at each other, shrugged, and followed their host inside.

Inside, the sound of the horror movie playing in the other room was even louder – machine gun fire, zombie groaning, and synthesizer soundtracks. The ghastly noise reminded Tom of a carnival spookhouse, and the foyer and hallway were lined with framed horror movie posters. Evil Dead. Night of the Living Dead. Several versions of Dawn of the Dead. Overdark. Near about every zombie flick imaginable held a place of honor upon the wall. “Welcome to my school,” the young doctor said. He hadn’t shaved in a few days, and his eyes were bloodshot, staring out from dark circles. “My name’s Regis.”

“Like the guy on TV?” Abe asked, perking up. Abe did love his morning talk shows.

But the doctor cocked his head curiously, as if he had no idea what Abe was talking about.

Tom made some quick introductions, shaking Doc Regis’ hand. His skin was cold and clammy, his handshake weak.

“You must really like horror movies, huh?” Tom asked, eyeing the macabre memorabilia.

Regis nodded. “All part of my work.”
“Just what kind of school is this?” Abe asked. The big Mennonite looked ready to bolt.

“Ah. The sign has you curious, doesn’t it?” He waved his hand before him, as if tossing the words into the air. “School for the Dead. I can’t

begin to tell you how many people come here just to see what that sign means. No doubt you thought it was a misprint.”

“It’s not?” Tom asked.

“Not at all.” Regis suppressed an excited giggle. He fidgeted, unable in his excitement to stand still. “Would you gentlemen like a tour?”

“It’s getting awful late,” Abe said. He didn’t want any part of the creepy doctor’s antics, whether he was named after his favorite television personality or not. “We should probably just call a tow truck.”

Regis clucked his tongue. “Gentlemen, let’s do away with the charade, why don’t we? There’s no shame in being curious. And the sign is nothing if not curious.”

Abe stepped back towards the door. “We don’t want to keep you up or disturb those people in the other room. We saw some people watching movies.”

“Oh, you won’t disturb them. They’re quite docile.”

Docile, Tom thought. Helluva thing to say.

Abe started to offer another excuse, but Tom interrupted him.

“You know what? I’d love a tour.”

Tom had to admit, he was damn curious about what was going on at the “School for the Dead,” and he kind of got a kick out of all the horror movie souvenirs.

Doc Regis smoothed out his white lab coat and stood tall and proud. He guided them through the house as he told his tale with the flair of a White House tour guide.

“Not too long ago, I was earning my living

creating special effects for the movies – mostly low budget gore pictures, but a few high profile films as well. I had a talent with makeup, and it was a nice way to earn a buck.”

“You used to work in Hollywood?” Tom asked, impressed. He’d never known anyone who worked with honest-to-God celebrities.

“I worked on many of the movies you see here.” He waved towards the posters. “Mostly zombie movies, I suppose, and it was zombie movies that brought about the revelation that I was meant for something more. Something important. I quit my job, moved here, and started my school in pursuit of my destiny.”

Every wall was decorated with a poster. Here and there, latex zombie props in glass cases leered at them. The young doctor stopped before a pair of double doors. He raised his voice to be heard over the movie sounds coming from the other side.

“I started to think these zombie apocalypse films could be something more than mere entertainment. They could be educational. Help to make the world better. What if these movies were used as a kind of . . . preventative measure?”

“So, what? You use horror movies to teach people about zombie invasions?” Tom snickered and nudged Abe with his elbow. “Any money in that?”

“This isn’t about capital gain.” Doc Regis grinned back at him, but his smile glowed with a kind of humorless malice. “Nor did I say my students were even alive.”

“I don’t get your meaning. We saw – ”

“Perhaps it would be best if I showed you.” With a flourish, he threw open the doors. “I’ll introduce you to the class.”

Regis descended a short flight of stairs. Tom and Abe followed him into the viewing room – the very room they had spied into earlier . . .

A room full of dead bodies.

More movie posters lined the walls. A glass cabinet in one corner was filled with what looked like tribal artifacts – voodoo masks and drums and blowguns. Numerous schoolhouse desks were lined up facing the big screen. And in almost every chair, a corpse had been propped. Some were recently dead, still looking vaguely human, except for the doll-like, staring eyes, the slack jaws, the pasty flesh, but others were as dry as tree branches, lips and eyelids gone, faces skeletal. Some wore the filthy rags of vagrants. Others, rumpled and stained hospital gowns. Still others seemed to be wearing the formalwear in which they had been buried. The earthy, rotting stink was awful.

On the TV, a group of zombies were being doused in gasoline and set ablaze.

“I like to think of it as aversion therapy,” Regis said.

The scene on the TV changed, and now a man was driving a screwdriver up a zombie’s nose, bright red blood and snot spilling down the shaft, the handle, the man’s fingers.

“Wait a minute.” Tom’s every muscle was tense. He was ready to flee or beat Doc Regis to death, whichever needed to be done, without hesitation. “You better explain what’s going on here.”

“Remember those old driver’s ed films that showed horrible car wrecks as a result of driving recklessly? It encouraged kids to drive more safely. This is the same theory, just applied to the undead. I show them the dangers of attacking humans. Massive head trauma. Being crushed beneath a muscle

car. Electrocutation. Chainsaws. They see the drawbacks associated with the hunger for human flesh. It's my way of keeping them calm. Notice how none of them – " He motioned towards the seated corpses. " – are reacting to your presence. They have no interest in feeding upon your flesh!"

"But they're dead," Abe said.

"Yes," Regis piped, "and completely passive! Isn't it wonderful?"

This guy is off his nut, Tom thought, and in a dangerous way.

He looked around the room for an easy exit. Besides the doors they had just come through, he saw another closed door, but it might have lead to a closet for all Tom knew.

"These ain't zombies," Abe said. "They're just dead."

"And I intend to keep them that way," Regis explained. His voice dropped a little. "Of course, I only show them the movie clips in which zombies are destroyed."

The scene on the TV changed again, and this was a very low budget movie, filmed on a lurching video camera, of a zombie getting its head bashed by a shovel.

"Would you gentlemen excuse me for a moment? This tape is almost over, and I need to get a new one. Then we'll call a tow truck to get your Impala."

He stepped through the door on the other side of the room.

"Let's get out of here," Abe said.

Tom readily agreed. Here he was surrounded by dead bodies, monster movies, and a display of devil's masks, totem dolls, and blow guns.

How did he know we drove an Impala? The thought sprung into Tom's head, quickly followed by another: One of the blow guns is missing from the case.

"Ow!"

Tom felt a stinging sensation at the back of his neck, like a hornet on steroids had just planted its stinger ass-deep in his flesh. He reached back and pulled a feathered dart free.

He heard a soft puffing.

His vision was already watery, his legs rubbery, by the time he turned towards Abe. A similar dart jutted from his friend's arm.

"Oh, shit."

Tom blacked out and fell over.

He came to sometime later, and realized right away he was strapped to a chair. He tried to look around, but his head lolled as if too heavy for his neck, and he only got a quick, spinning view of the room. He was in a garage, he thought, spacious with unfinished walls and a concrete floor. He glimpsed a pegboard on one wall, tools tidily hanging in place above a workbench. On a small folding table next to his chair, he saw cotton swabs, a little bottle of brownish liquid, and several messy plastic canisters of theatrical makeup.

"My apologies, gentlemen, for the harsh treatment." Regis was busy loading a tape into a video camera pointed in Tom's direction. "I wouldn't resort to this kind of drastic measure, but my work is far too important."

"Untie me," Tom slurred.

"I'm afraid not." Regis pressed a button on the camera. The tape inside clicked and whirled. The red light started flashing. The young man turned towards them, rubbing his hands

together eagerly. "Let's get started, shall we?"

"Started with what?"

"Why, furthering my work, of course." Regis removed his lab coat. "You see, I worry my students might be growing bored with the current batch of movies, too accustomed to them, if you will. It's almost as if they're building an immunity to seeing the same old movies over and over, and the current crop of zombie movies is simply too sparse. They can't be expected to continue learning unless I introduce something fresh into the mix. So I thought I'd make a few movies of my own."

Someone groaned.

Tom swung his head around and saw Abe tied to a chair next to him. Only, Abe had been covered in makeup, his skin painted blue grey in flaking cornmeal thick patches. His eyes were rolled up, and drool oozed down his chin. On the table next to Abe's chair, an empty hypodermic needle lay.

Tom also noticed his own hands were painted in gray makeup, made to look weathered and decayed. He felt the itchiness of makeup on his face.

Regis approached Abe, tilted his head back, looked into his eyes.

Abe growled at him.

"What did you do to him?" Tom asked.

But Regis didn't answer. With expert efficiency, he untied Abe, then turned and casually walked across the room to the workbench.

Abe staggered to his feet, knocking the chair over with a clatter.

"Get him, Abe!" Tom said. "Wring his neck!"

His back turned, the doctor fidgeted with something at the workbench. On unsteady legs, Abe lurched towards him. Whatever drugs Regis had pumped into him kept him off balance, but if he got his hands on the doctor, that would be all she wrote. He'd break the little bastard like a twig and they'd be back on the road again in no time.

Abe didn't move like a person at all, though. He moved more like one of those zombies he'd seen getting killed over and over again on Regis' classroom television.

Tom choked. "Oh, Jesus."

Regis turned. He held a cordless power drill. He pulled the trigger a couple of times, revving it up.

Abe reached for the doctor with twitching fingers. He tried to say something, but it came out as, "Hrrgh grrrr hurgh urgh."

Zombie speak profanity.

The camera rolled.

Regis ducked under Abe's outstretched arms, used some sort of judo move to sweep the big Mennonite's legs out from under him.

"Abe!" Tom struggled to tear free of his ropes, but he was held tight.

Regis crouched down on top of Abe, and his back blocked Tom's view, but he saw Regis raise the drill and drive it towards his friend's face, and he heard the spinning bit grind down as if mired in thick wood as Abe's arms spasmed and fingers twitched and legs kicked in a pool of spreading blood and piss oozing across the floor.

"All . . . flesh eaters . . . must . . . die!" cried Regis, hamming it up for the camera as he pushed the drill down. He threw his head back

in a kind of rapture. Blood speckled his face. The drill ground to a halt.

Abe's legs twitched for a couple of seconds, then lay still.

Regis stood, wiping his bloody hands off on his black shirt, leaving the drill embedded in Abe's face. He let the camera roll for a little longer, then walked over and shut it off.

"Wrap," he said.

"Why?" Tom asked. "Why'd you kill him? You could have faked it. You didn't have to kill anybody, especially not Abe. Not for real."

Regis walked up to him and patted his cheek.

"Where was all that smart thinking when you decided to trespass on my property?"

Tom bucked and kicked, trying to break free and get ahold of Regis. The doctor danced away with ease, and Tom's bindings held.

"You let me go!" Tom shouted. "You let me go, you little bastard!"

But his voice had lost its deep, mean rumble, and instead sounded high-pitched and scared.

Regis was breathing hard from his scene with Abe, and he grabbed his lab coat and walked towards the door. "I'm going to get cleaned up, have a little dinner, and do a quick wardrobe change." He waved his finger, as if just remembering an important point. "I need to think up a new scene, too, something innovative. See if you can come up with anything while you wait. Then, lights . . . camera . . . action."

He closed the door behind him.

Tom wasn't about to sit idly by waiting for his moment in the spotlight.

The chair to which he was tied was a creaking wooden number, the kind you might find in a elementary school cafeteria. The floor beneath him was cold and hard. Even though his ankles were bound to the chair legs, he could move his feet a little. He pushed up onto his tiptoes, and the chair leaned back. He let himself drop down and immediately kicked back off his tiptoes again, this time with all his might. The back legs of the chair scooted on the floor, and Tom toppled backwards.

The weight of his body – bolstered by cheeseburgers and onion rings – shattered the wooden chair into kindling. A fart escaped his bowels, a quick one-gun salute to his fallen friend.

He shrugged the remaining ropes off. He forced himself to look at Abe. The sight of his best friend sprawled on the floor in a pool of blood, a Black and Decker jutting out of his face, filled Tom with a bitter rage. He was going to kill Doc Regis, he decided. But first he needed to get out of here. He still felt groggy and weak, and he needed time to prepare himself. He'd split for now, but come back bringing Hell with him.

On the wall, he saw an automatic garage door opener. He pushed the button and let the door rattle open. A cool fresh breeze flooded into the room. Tom didn't care if Regis heard the door opening. With any luck at all, he'd be long gone before the scrawny doctor caught him.

Still wobbly, he rushed outside. He didn't recognize this part of the yard, and he guessed he was around the back of the house. Still, if he stuck to the woods and shadows, he'd be able to make it to the car pretty easily. As he rushed through the woods, he felt some of his strength flooding back into his muscles. He dug the car keys from his pocket, clenched them in a tight, makeup-covered fist.

I'll pay him back, Abe, he thought, pay him back

good.

The Impala was where they had left it, and as he opened the door, he saw his reflection in the window, a ghastly undead version of himself. He jumped into the car, cranked the engine, and threw the transmission into reverse. The rear of the car crashed into the brush. He threw it into drive and hit the gas, tearing down the path at full speed.

He looked in the rearview, saw the ruined metal gates vanish in a cloud of red. He wiped his sweaty forehead with the back of his arm, smearing some of the makeup into his eyes. He grunted, blinked.

Just as a deer leapt into the road.

Tom hit the brakes.

The deer struck the grill, rolled over the hood, and smashed into the windshield. The car careened off the path, wrapping itself around a tree. Tom's jaw smacked against the dash, breaking teeth.

A blast of steam sprayed from beneath the hood, and the deer bleated and kicked against the blood-smeared windshield. Tom pulled himself out of the car and sprawled onto the path.

He couldn't catch his breath, and the taste of blood in his mouth almost made him puke. He blacked out, came to, blacked out again and somehow forced himself awake because he had to get moving.

But he didn't have the strength to stand.

He heard the crunch of approaching footsteps.

Doc Regis stepped out of the darkness.

On quivering arms, Tom pushed himself up.

If this is where we're gonna fight, then by God I'll give him the fight of his –

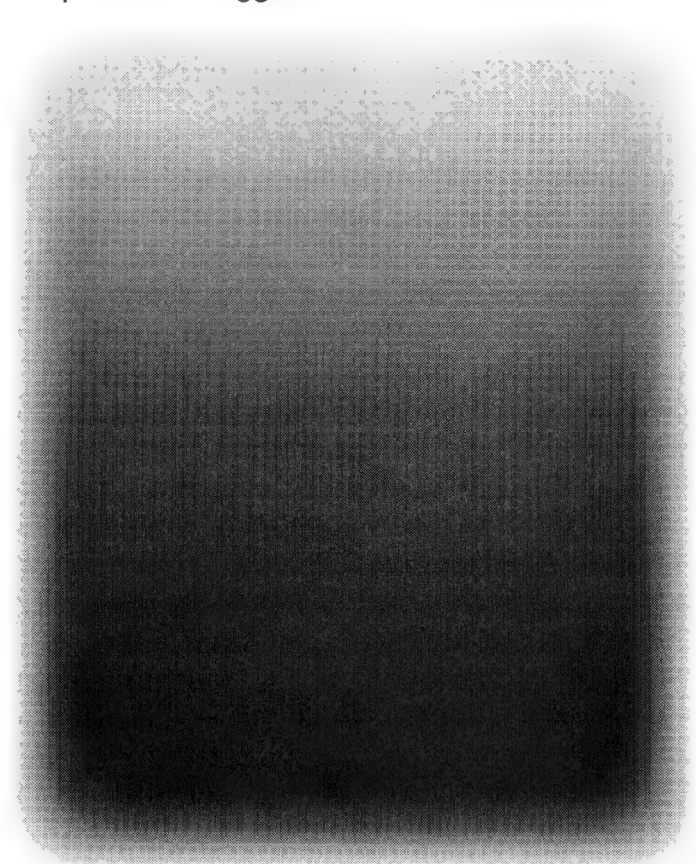
Regis planted a boot on Tom's chest and pushed him down. For such a little fella, Regis was strong, probably from lugging all those bodies around. Sweat-diluted pancake makeup seeped into Tom's eyes, blurring his vision, but he noticed the winking red light of a security camera flickering at him from a nearby copse of trees, recording everything. Looking up again, he gazed into the yawning barrel of pistol pointed right between his eyes.

Regis pressed the cold metal against Tom's forehead, hard enough to bruise flesh. His finger tensed on the trigger.

"You better hope I don't come back, asshole," Tom spat.

"Don't worry," Regis chimed. "We have an open enrollment policy."

He pulled the trigger.



to all my friends.
That's the merriest Christmas any smoker can have —
Chesterfield mildness plus no unpleasant after-taste

see DONALD REAGAN
smoking in "KONG KONG" a First
Thames Foremost Production
Color by Technicolor



CHESTERFIELD

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Christmas-card carton*

The Continuing Saga of Dr. Iguana

The Story So Far

by Ken Burke



SEX ON THE BEACH

*Less than a Party -
More than a Drink.*

"My favorite beach movie? Sands of Iwo Jima starring John Wayne. If Frankie and Annette weren't in that, they should have been."

— Fez Bosco, *The Homicidal Surfboard*
(1975)

Recently, this writer viewed the 1966 black and white film *Lord Love a Duck*. Starring Tuesday Weld — the Lindsey Lohan of her day — it's about a high school genius (played by youngish looking thirty-eight-year-old Roddy McDowell) who helps a beautiful, young blonde get noticed by her upper echelon peers and, later, Hollywood. The asexual character succeeds in helping her, but ends up in jail, where he tells his story in flashback.

At one point, Weld and McDowell's characters go to an exclusive beach during Spring Break. Unbeknownst to them, just offshore in a small cabin cruiser, a producer of beach movies played by Martin Gabel ("I've produced seventeen beach movies and this is the first time I've ever been to the beach!") spots all the bikini-clad dancing teens and begins to mull over titles for his next teen-oriented extravaganza.

"We need a title. Um . . . Bikini Vampire. Teenaged Bikini Vampire. Um, I *Married a Teenaged Bikini Vampire*."

Then, distracted by Tuesday Weld's character riding on a whale shaped shuttle craft, he joins two thoughts together and spews, "I *Married a Teenaged Bikini Vampire* on . . . um . . . Some Sort of Fish."

Annoyed by his numbskull brainstorming, the producer's martini-swilling, busty bikini babe girlfriend whines, "Oh Harry, teenaged vampires are such a drag." Then she throws the script into the water below. The producer jumps in to retrieve his precious words and, forgetting that he can't swim, starts to drown. Fortunately, Weld saves him and what promises to be a real stinker of a script. Once back on board, McDowell flatters the B-movie mogul by saying, "I happen to think that *The Thing That Ate Bikini Beach* is one of the ten greatest movies ever made!"

The producer then points to the whiny busty babe who thinks everything is a drag, "You may recognize Kitten here from Cold War Bikini."

"Another of the ten greatest," spouts McDowell's character.

Eventually, McDowell's character, who asks to be called "Mollymauck" (a bird thought to be extinct but isn't), plots and schemes the beautiful blonde Weld into and out of a society marriage and secures her a shot at stardom in good old-fashioned beach movies – the kind they showed in drive-ins around the country. Chances are her stardom wouldn't have lasted very long.

1987's *Back to the Beach* aside, George Axelrod's *Lord Love a Duck* was meant to be the unofficial end of the Beach Party picture cycle. Death by satire so to speak.

Beach locales have been a cheap way to provide atmosphere for motion pictures since the very inception of the medium. Silent comedy king Mack Sennett produced a series of bathing beauty comedy shorts that launched Gloria Swanson's career. The lovemaking amid the crashing waves on the beach scene between Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr in 1953's *From Here to Eternity*, remains iconic. However, babyboomers became fixated on the Beach Party genre with the arrival of such teen-oriented flicks as *Gidget* (1959) and *Where the Boys Are* (1960). These A-pictures were essentially soap opera-stories about college aged teens whose needs had

been so well met that their biggest concern was which beach to revel on during Spring Break.

It was cigar-chompin' Samuel Z. Arkoff at American-International Pictures that sweated the beach picture down to its essentials -- sun, fun, music, and close-ups of girls in bikinis. *Beach Party* (1963) starring bland pop singer Frankie Avalon and shapely ex-Mouseketeer Annette Funicello proved such a big hit, that Arkoff ordered up a series of sequels including *Muscle Beach Party*, *Bikini Beach*, *Beach Blanket Bingo*, and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*.

Further, the penny-pinching, innovative Arkoff commissioned such twists on the formula as *Ski Party*, *Pajama Party*, and *Fireball 500*. Cheaply and efficiently done, they all turned a profit, and other companies followed his lead until the genre was played out by 1967.

Arkoff's Beach Party movies

were successful and remain watchable today because he hired people like writer-director William Asher – later the husband of Bewitched star Elizabeth Montgomery – who knew how to wring slapstick comedy and dramatic tension out of the oh-so-slight scripts. It was also amusing to see such adult stars as Bob Cummings, Dorothy Malone, Keenan Wynn, Morey Amsterdam, Buddy Hackett, Buster Keaton, and Don Rickles slumming with Eric Von Zipper and the Ratz and Mice motorcycle gang.

Best of all was the casting of Avalon as



“Frankie” and Funicello as “DeeDee.” (Why the former got to use his real first name and Annette didn’t is a mystery that no one seems to care about. My theory? Avalon couldn’t memorize another name.) Two nice-looking young people, Avalon and Funicello basically proved that you don’t need much talent to make it in the entertainment biz.

A former trumpet player with Rocco and the Saints, the Philadelphia-native Avalon (born Francois Avallone) enjoyed a solid string of Top Ten pop hits on Bob Marcucci and Peter DeAngelis’s Chancellor Records label. Masters at cultivating and packaging performers for the era’s undemanding teen female audiences, the producer/songwriter team enjoyed a solid business relationship with American Bandstand’s Dick Clark, who aggressively promoted such bland Avalon fare as “DeDe Dinah” (on which he appropriately held his nose while he sang), “Just Ask Your Heart,” “Bobby Sox to Stockings,” and the singer’s one true pop classic “Venus.”

By all accounts a nice family man with a professional to-the-bone work ethic, Avalon was far from the being the best singing teen idol in Philadelphia. That honor would probably go to Bobby Rydell (nee Robert Riderelli) whose Cameo recordings outclassed both Avalon’s and labelmate Fabian’s in the departments of sass and vocal range. Yet Avalon could confidently stand on a soundstage, hit his mark, throw custard pies, and speak corny, contrived lines without flinching – something Rydell found difficult to accomplish.

Less talented but far more memorable, Funicello came to national attention on the old Danny Thomas Show and Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse Club. A cute and well-mannered child actor, the Utica, New York-born performer proved a favorite with both adults and kids. Naturally, any fresh-faced youngster buoyed by TV fame was expected to make records, and Funicello was no exception. A pallid vocalist at best, the Disney label tricked up her records

with double-tracks and supplied her with cutesy-to-the-point of nausea ditties ala her big hits “Pineapple Princess,” “First Name Initial,” and “Tall Paul.”

Although there was never a suggestion of anything remotely impure about Funicello or the roles she played, the dewy-eyed brunette grew into an erotic looking teenager, and TV viewers weren’t the only ones who thought so. Then a teenager himself, singer-songwriter Paul Anka was said to have written the 1960 hit “Puppy Love” about his attraction to the curvy star. As an actress, she knew how to look wistful, stamp her foot petulantly, and occasionally snap out a sarcastic one-liner like an ex-wife in training. Occasionally, her character would espouse some early feminist dialogue, but mostly this fit, feisty girl generally waited around for “Frankie” to rescue her in every film.

Despite the fact that neither Avalon nor Funicello exhibited much acting ability, these two good-looking young people did churn up enough chemistry to convince audiences they really were a couple. This took some doing as Avalon was a married man with a growing family, and Funicello would be married before their series of films ended. Talentwise, all was not equal. Avalon, the better vocalist of the two, carried most of the songs. Funicello sang simply and sweetly and displayed a nice harmony sense in her duets with Avalon, but frankly neither Lesley Gore nor Connie Francis were losing sleep over her vocal efforts.

Neither danced nor surfed particularly well, and the generously proportioned Annette had promised Walt Disney – who loaned her out to A.I.P. – that she wouldn’t wear a two-piece bikini like all the other girls who tastefully shook their youthful behinds for the camera lens.

(Imagine being the respective parents of the scantily clad girls in these beach movies. “Mom, Dad – come see the movie I’m in.” The parents in question probably got all dressed up in their Sunday finest only to see their young daughter’s barely covered ass blown up to fit a

drive-in movie screen, wiggling furiously in time to a primordial rock'n'roll beat.)

As a typical teen couple, "Frankie" and "DeeDee" bickered petulantly about sex and why they weren't having any. Being the early to mid-60s, in movie time about 1956, "DeeDee" insisted that she and "Frankie" be married before they copulate. "Frankie's" argument was simple and admirably honest: I want sex and I want it now – no strings. The couple would then break up, participate in some bizarre low comedy adventures with their good-looking, lamebrain pal "Deadhead," make up and sing a final song together.

Of course, the implied subtext of all the original beach party movies is that the boys were so keyed up from lack of sex that they did goofy outrageous things to sublimate their sexual drives. OK, maybe that's the basis of all comedy. It also provides a reason why they stopped making these kinds of beach pictures after 1967. Besides the fact that all the so-called teenagers were beginning to look like the 30-year-old men and women that they actually were, the sexual revolution was running rampant during the late-60s. I was ten-years-old when I first saw the Frankie and Annette movies, and even then I thought they were fun but naive.

Sometimes, when I'm all geared up on too much caffeine and my guts wretch with cynicism, I wonder if the Beach Party movies wouldn't have been more interesting if "Frankie" were the one who resisted sex before marriage.

Scene: Frankie and Annette sitting together alone on a blanket at the beach.

Annette
(Coy and seductive.)

*Frankie, I've got special plans for us tonight.
Just you and me.*

Frankie
Oh no, Annette.

Annette
What's the matter? Don't you love me?

Frankie
(Condescendingly reassuring.)
You know I love you.

Annette
*Then why don't you want to make love to me
– make love to me hard, all night long?*

Frankie
(Panicked.)
Annette, PLEASE! Don't talk like that in public.

Annette
(Frustrated.)
*But Frankie, you don't even want to exchange
hand-jobs. Are you gay or something?*

Frankie
What makes you think that?

Annette
*Well . . . shouldn't a twenty-nine-year-old man
have hair somewhere on his body?*

Frankie
*I've told you – I shave my chest and legs to get
better glide while I'm surfing.*

Annette
*Frankie, I've told you a million times – it's the
board that's touching the water, not you!*

Frankie
*You've never understood my commitment to
surfing.*

Annette
*I'm twice the surfer you are. I've never fallen off
the board while scaling the curls.*

Frankie
*That's because you have two unfair advantages
over me.*

Annette
Oh and what are those?

Frankie
Your beautiful symmetrical, heaving breasts.

Annette
Oh Frankie, you noticed.

Frankie
Along with your sumptuous hips and ass...

Annette
(Excited.)
Oh Frankie, you do like girls.

Frankie
. . . provide a perfect center of gravity for surfing. I just wish I had breasts and a womanly ass.

Annette
(Ignoring last comment. Breathing heavily.)
Oh Frankie, Frankie, kiss me . . . kiss me down there.

Frankie
(Shocked)
Annette! No!

Annette
(Angry!)
Damn it Frankie, I want sex and I want it now!

Frankie
(Smiles indulgently.)
Annette. I know you want me to take you like a man.

Annette
(Dreamily.)
Oh yes.

Frankie
And I want that too.

Annette
Say what?

Frankie
But don't you see how much more special it will be if we wait until we're married?

Annette
(Grumbling.)
I guess so.

Frankie
Once we're married and we can lose our virginity . . .

Annette
(Tries to interrupt.)
But Frankie I'm not a . . .

Frankie
(Talks over her interjection.)
. . . no one can stop us. I'll be able to give you my all wild, unbridled love



over and over and over again!

Annette
Can I have that in writing?

Frankie
Oh Annette . . . you're the greatest.
(Gives her a chaste peck on the cheek.)

Annette
(Sighs. Lights up a huge Cuban cigar and takes a deep drag.)

Frankie
Hey! When did you start smoking cigars?

Annette
(Puffing furiously.)
Just now.

(Cut to Big Daddy who runs excitedly onto the beach to make an announcement.)

Big Daddy
Hey kids! Gather 'round! Here's Dick Dull and the Dale-Tones with their new hit "Twistin' Sex on the Beach."

Dick Dull
(Singing and playing a guitar that isn't plugged in.)

*Take your girl and give her all you've got.
Roll her in the sand and find the wet spot.*

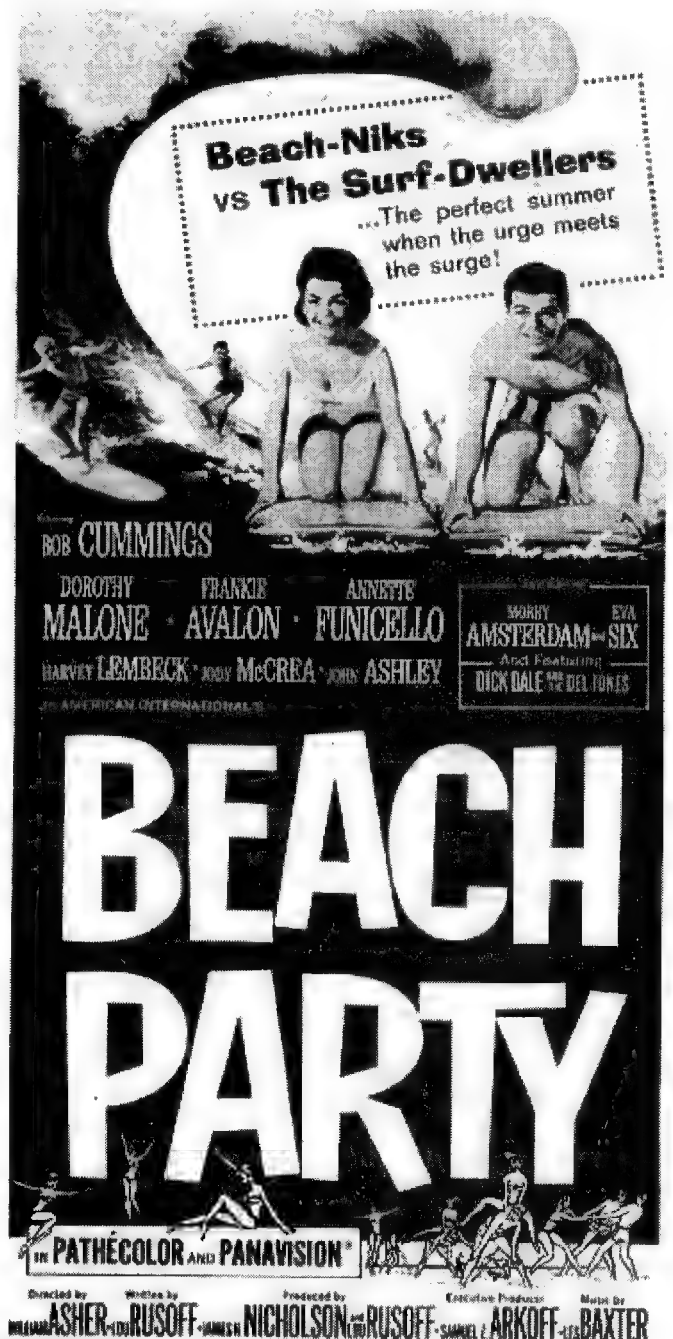
*Then twist her. Yeah, yeah twist her!
Twist your girl until the feeling's outta reach.
That's what we call twistin' sex on the beach!*

Annette
(Takes deep meaningful drag off cigar and mutters.)
Not on this beach.

Frankie
(Mildly shocked.)
Gee, what a suggestive song.

Annette
(Puffs harder on cigar as the rock'n'roll gets louder and more frenzied.)
Oh Frankie, you're such a prude.

Frankie
(Blithely misunderstanding the comment.)
Thanks Annette. Let's do one of those new dances where nobody touches each other.



"... where the surge meets the urge ... !"

(Resigned to a life of sexual frustration, Annette drops her cigar and dances with feverish animal intensity – several feet away from Frankie as the scene fades out.)

Why Modern Beach Party Movies Would Never Work.

As innocent as they were, the old Beach movies did reflect some sort of reality. The times were less cynical, the rules were black and white, and most of the teens at least tried to behave themselves. I'm not saying that kids of the early to mid-1960s were better or nicer than today's progeny – that's just a given – but most modern-day teenagers are preoccupied with drugs, video games, cellphone texting, and have become increasingly passive and non-committal. Subsequently, they don't actually do anything – especially the males. Fewer and fewer boys play sports, join clubs, dance, or even surf. Those that do are looked upon as freaks by their prematurely cynical contemporaries.

Moreover, we live in the age of agony and irony, and a modern moviemaker's idea of a good beach film would never focus on sun, sand, and sounds. Indeed, today's filmmakers would prefer to create a societal indictment that both exposes and exploits their target audience. The film in question would probably contain a scene much like the following.

Scene: A nameless California beach – polluted, littered and audibly buzzing with flies. Three heavily tattooed teenagers – two boys and one girl – are wearing hoodies are sitting in the sand sharing a quart of beer and smoking cigarettes.

Frank
Man, look at those dorks surfing!

Deadvein
Hey look! I just found a hypodermic needle in the sand.

Frank
Great, now we can finally get high.

Deadvein
Yeah. I haven't been high since last Thursday.

Frank
That's why they call you "Mr. Straight."

Deadvein
What can I say, dude? My body is a temple.

Netta
(To Boy #1.)
I thought we were supposed to fuck.

Frank
You know I can't get hard when I'm high.

Netta
But I want to fuck!

Frank
Let him do it!

Netta
What?

Frank
You know I'd bone you if I could. Just close your eyes and pretend it's me. If I can get it up after I'm high, I'll try and do you then.

Netta
(Dreamily closes eyes as Boy 2 drops pants.)
Oh Frank, you do love me.

Frank
(Injecting drugs.)
Ummg, unng, unng . . .

Deadvein
(Humping away.)
yeh . . . yeh . . . yeh . . .

Netta
(Eyes still closed.)

*Someday Frank and I will write to each other
in prison.*

Throw in music by some manic high-on-inspiration, low-on-chops punk band and you'll have a movie that critics will love but that no one would actually pay to see.

Beach Movies of the Future Probably Won't Even Feature Humans.

My friend Steglio Cortez, a Miami resident who has witnessed a lot of debauchery in the name of sun 'n' fun, once opined that people have too much to lose to be happy and carefree at the beach these days. "Guys are always too busy sucking in their guts or competing with some drunk, doped-up loudmouth to surf, ski, or show a lady a good time. Meanwhile, the women are too worried

about their hair and their skimpy designer bathing suits to ever go in the water. Nobody gets wet. Nobody gets laid. Everyone just gets loaded and sunburnt. It's pathetic, really. Who'd want to make a movie about that?"

Someday the Beach Party movie may return, but it will no longer reflect a human reality. The 2008 Disney film *Wall-E* proved that modern audiences will buy an old-fashioned comedic love story under two circumstances.

- 1.) The story must be animated.
- 2.) The characters must be played by robots.

Yes, for some odd reason, we now imbue robots, cyborgs, and androids with the same anthropomorphist, irony-free sweetness and sincerity that we usually reserve for puppies.



"Aw, look at the cute robot." So naturally, Beach Party movies of the future will probably spotlight really wholesome values and star cute, young looking robots on surfboards.

Boy Robot

Oh DeeDee 9000, series B, class 4-A, when can we interphase?

Girl Robot

Not until our formats are compatible.

Boy Robot

But DeeDee 9000, series B, class 4-A, my calculations conclusively prove that I cannot wait that long.

Girl Robot

Don't you see Frankie singerbot 8, model 27-R, if we wait until we are compatible, our electronic ecstasy will be 9.2 times to the third power greater than if we just knock one off right now.

Boy Robot

I am not programmed to argue with your speculative logic. However, may I theorize that

there is something to be said for doing it now while our reactor cores are still young?

Big Robot Daddy

Hey kids! Gather 'round! Here's Dick Dull 2.0 and the Dial-Up Tones with their new hit . . .

(Music plays and the robots dance themselves into a dizzying diode-induced frenzy as the credits start to roll.)

Boy Robot

(Apparently aroused, but who can really tell?) Sand in my gearbox . . . gearbox . . . gearbox . . . gearbox . . .

Girl Robot

(Dreamily.)

Someday Frankie singerbot 8, model 27-R and I will share a compatible format.

So, if they made Beach Party movies with surfing robots in bikinis, would I watch them?

You bet I would.

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For more information, see Coppertone
advertising literature.

Viewing Greg "Oblivian" Cartwright's massive collection of old vinyl records might lead one to believe that his songwriting would be anything but original. And while Greg often does throw anything from classic soul to doo wop into the mix, his sound is, not to put too fine a point on it, his own.

Born and raised in Memphis, Cartwright found himself, in his teenage years, immersing himself in the southern city's legendary musical scene. His high school days were spent at the Antenna Club, a now defunct music venue, that booked punk and rock 'n' roll shows.

After getting all growned up, Greg spent the 1990s and 2000s releasing a slew of albums with his bands The Compulsive Gamblers, The Oblivians, and his current project, The Reigning Sound, while also playing out and about with such incendiary garage rock and soul outfits like 68 Comeback and The Detroit Cobras. In the process of working to supplant James

Brown as the hardest working man in show biz, Cartwright established a dedicated following while continuing to reinvent his sound with every record he released.

Now living in Asheville, NC with his family, Cartwright seems more focused on music than ever. He may be busy raising children with his wife Esther, but he still finds time to sneak out to his garage

Stepping Into Oblivian with Greg Cartwright *by Rich Tupica*



and write music. (As we write this, Cartwright is in the midst of planning a much-anticipated reunion tour with The Oblivians. Should that go smoothly, there could be couple of shows with

The Compulsive Gamblers and The Gories as well.)

Brutarian: When did you first get into rock 'n' roll records?

Greg: Growing up, my dad was a record collector, so we always had lots of records

No, they really kind of deleted a lot of that stuff. In fact, I remember when I got my very first car when I was seventeen, it was a Dodge Dart, and I listened to an oldies station religiously. They played a lot of doo wop and r&b that I was really into at the time. I remember the day I was driving to school, my senior year, and I heard an ad



around. I just really liked the kind of stuff that he played. He was into a lot of British invasion bands, and some early American rock stuff like Chuck Berry, The Beatles, The Kinks, and all that. When we were in the car, we always listened to oldies stations, so I got a big dose of doo wop and r&b. It used to be, when I was a kid, oldies stations were not as limited as they are now. You'd hear a lot of oddball things, like local hits, not just Top Forty stuff. I think kids nowadays listen to oldies stations and get the idea that there were only about ninety hits from the years 1956 to 1970.

Oldies stations don't really play any 50s music at all anymore.

on the radio that said, "The new Oldies 98, no more boring doo wop! Just hits from the late 60s and early 70s." I thought, "Man, what is with this? Not only do you have to take away all the good music, but you also have to insult the people that like it?" [laughs]

Which is funny, because it's not boring in any sense.

No, it's great. It just goes to show, as each generation gets older, I guess they decide that the people who want to hear that were a dying breed, and they weren't going to cater to them anymore. Little did they know, there were kids who grew up on that stuff and

really dug it as well. The times roll on.

Now you look at the schedule at any given bar, in any given town, there is inevitably an 80s night. Now, that's an oldie. Madonna is an oldie. I guess, to some people it is, to people who grew up during that time period, it may be classic. As the decades roll on, the concept of what is a truly classic song changes.

You've mentioned how you spent a lot of time with your grandmother growing up, why were you at her place so often?

Both of my parents worked, and my grandmother didn't, so I just spent most of my time with her. At one point, we lived right across the street from her. Eventually we moved, but it was only a couple blocks away. She was always only a bicycle ride away. That was from when I started kindergarten on. Every summer was spent with her. This was pre-day care days. Beyond summers, I spent almost every weekend with her. She was a real interesting person to hang out with. She's a real character.

Was your family always in Memphis?

I pretty much grew up there my whole life, with the exception of when I lived in New York for about a year or so.

Did you grow up in a suburb or Memphis proper?

I was not in a suburb until my last two years of high school. But up until then, we lived in a part of town called Frayser (in North Memphis) that was inside Memphis proper, in the area where the International Harvester Tractor manufacturing plant was. That's where my grandfather worked, where one of my uncles worked. My father worked at the Firestone factory making tires. At that time in Memphis, you had the agriculture, which was still a big part of commerce there, but there was a bit of factory work as well. And two of the biggest were Harvester and Firestone. Everybody pushed to get a factory job right out of high school. There wasn't a lot else, to be honest. But then Harvester closed, and Firestone closed, and the 70s up to the 80s were some lean years for Memphis. There were some bad things about that because, obviously, there was no money. When there was no money coming in and no reason for people to go there, Memphis kind of got trapped in this time warp of things not changing very much for a decade or two.

How did you get serious about record collecting?

My dad was a record collector, so the idea of having a lot of records was something I was born into. When I was just a six years old, I had a portable record player that I'd take with me everywhere I went. I inherited all my uncle's and aunt's records that were at my grandmother's house where I spent most of my summers. She gave me all of their 45s; there was a lot of oddball Memphis stuff in there that you wouldn't hear on the radio anymore. There was just a lot of odd stuff in general in there. Also,



spending my summers with her, she was a total pack rat, and we'd spend our days going to thrift stores and yard sales where she'd give me two dollars or so to spend. And once I grew out of the stage of buying GI Joes and stuff, I started looking for other things, and I always liked records. So my appetite for getting more records just grew and grew. By the time I was in my teens, I was getting introduced to other things by friends at school, like a lot of punk stuff and more out-there things that were on the fringe of culture that my dad didn't know about – things I wasn't going to hear on the radio.

What got you paying attention to punk rock?

A lot of the punk stuff really clicked for me because it really seemed like a lot of the same aesthetic that I liked about other music. There was a definite line you could draw from some 50s and 60s stuff to The Misfits because the chord changes are basically the same. Also, a lot of my friends in junior high and I would go to see these all ages shows at the Antenna (a now defunct Memphis club). A lot of those were hardcore shows. I really gave it a shot, but hardcore never really clicked with me, aside from maybe one or two bands. The things I liked most about music – the melody, really good lyrics and all that – were not there. The energy and angst was there, but it didn't seem to have any hooks, it all seemed the same.

Like I said, there were exceptions, but for the most part, I saw one hundred hardcore bands and liked three of them.

If you didn't dig hardcore, what were you into?

I remember I went with a friend one time to see an all-ages show, I was probably about sixteen. We waited and waited, I can't even remember who the band was, but we waited a long time for the show to start. Finally

McGee, the guy who owned the Antenna, said, "Well the band called and said they have a flat tire, they're not coming." So we were kind of bummed. I was too young to drink at the time, but we always managed to find alcohol anyway, so we found some alcohol, went somewhere with a couple quarts of malt liquor, and then wandered back toward the Antenna to see what was going on. We managed to get in, and it looked like there was a band loading in stuff, that there was going to be a show. We were thinking maybe something happened, and this band made it after all. But it wasn't the hardcore band at all, it was a local band that I was totally unaware of called Tav Falco & the Panther Burns. When I saw that I thought, "Well, this is infinitely more interesting than any of that stuff that people had been dragging me to see for the last year and a half."

So you dug it right away?

It instantly clicked with me. Although it was chaotic, there was definitely a wild, almost punk element about Panther Burns. But he was into all the kind of stuff that really turned me on. That was Tav's thing – blues, rockabilly, country, odd r&b. Suddenly I thought I've been wasting my time trying to like hardcore, and here's this thing that was in my own backyard that I was totally unaware of. From there on, I started looking for more bands like that. Then you get into The Cramps and all of these other things that kind of ride that line, that are really good, gritty rock 'n' roll, but are also on the outside of culture, like punk. So that was a real eye opener. I continued to hunt records in thrift stores and junk shops.

The fun part of record collecting, especially back then, and this is obviously pre-Internet, is that when you find something, if you find a really cool Andre Williams 45, you've got no point of reference, no Internet to research it, you've just got this totally

amazing jewel. It's a mystery. You sit and listen to it over and over and think, "Where did this come from? How could somebody make something like this?" That's definitely what sparked me as a record collector, to want more records. Those mysteries are what keep you going. When you think you've heard everything, you find something way-out and crazy.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of garbage to sift through to get to the good stuff.

You got to know what kind of things you're looking for. Back when I was just hitting thrift stores all the time, records cost a dime. I could buy a handful and if half of them were stinkers, it was no big deal, I still only spent a dollar. Things are more expensive now, and with the Internet you have people trying to hype records that are really only average, or in some cases, just flat-out bad. They use tag words like "fuzz," "northern soul," all these things that trick people into buying bad records. Back then, it was a cheap gamble. Now you have to know exactly what you're looking for because things are more expensive.

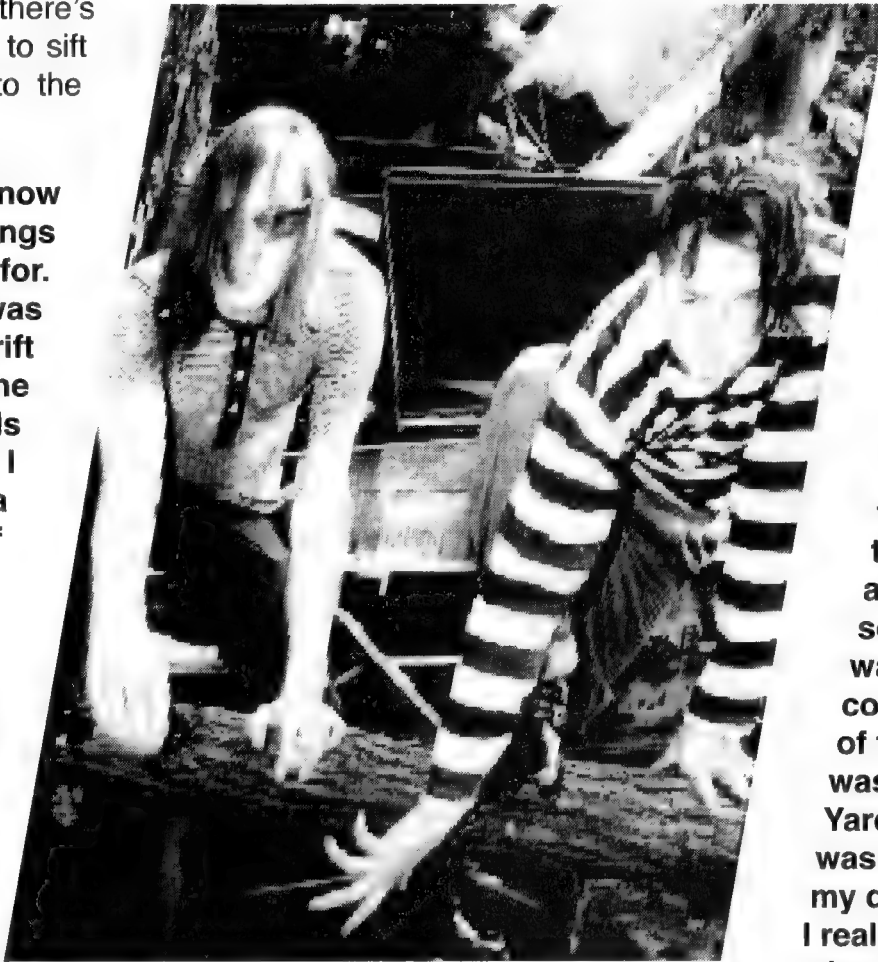
When did you first start writing songs?

Probably by the time I saw Tav, I already had a band. I was already trying to write songs. The first band I had? Well, I played with people in their garages and stuff as early as seventh grade. By the time I was in my last year of junior high school, I had a band with these guys I went to school with. The Stiffs, I think, was the name of the band. The name of the band changed a couple times. It was

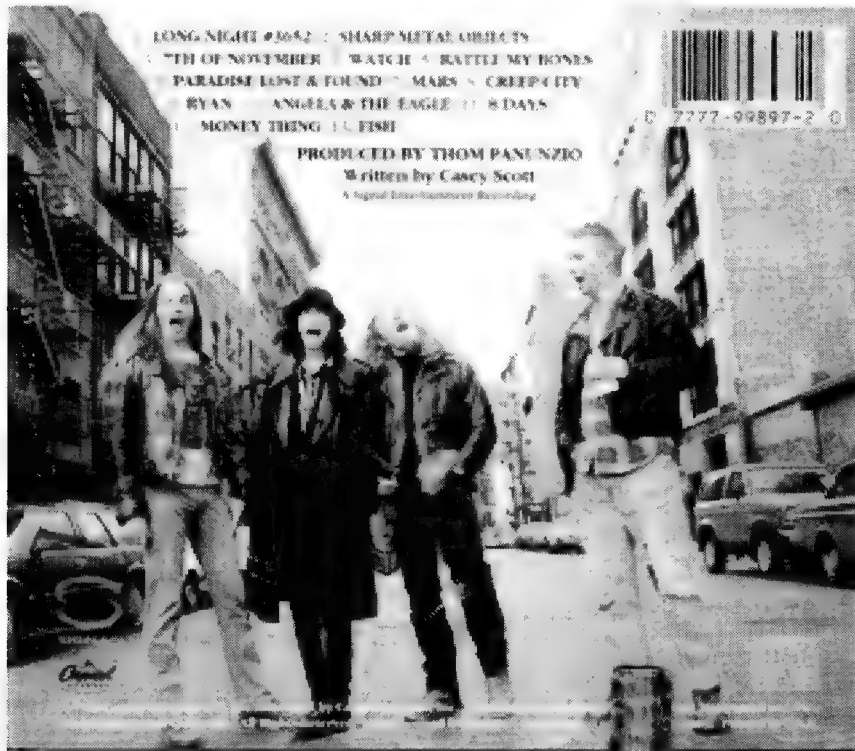
me, and this guy named Chris Coble, Shaun Jacobson and another buddy of mine, Tom, played guitar for awhile. I would write songs and we'd do lots of covers. Not long ago, I found a rehearsal tape, there were a couple of my songs and there was a Yardbirds' cover. I can't think of the name, but it wasn't a common Yardbirds' track. It was on one of the LPs my dad had, a track I really liked. These other guys, some of them were aware of the

music I was listening to, but some of them weren't, and it was pretty amazing that I managed to drag these people along to play with me. They were kind of weird songs; they dug, but it was one of those things where you hope to get somebody else to dig what you dig. It worked out pretty good.

I was trying to write songs and listening to my dad's records and would try to cop what some of the people were doing. I



remember when I was fourteen or so, I was really into The Man Who Sold the World and Ziggy Stardust albums, I just thought those records were so amazing, and I was really blown away by Mick Ronson's guitar playing. I was just starting to play guitar, and I was really trying hard to copy Mick Ronson's sound. It was really exciting to



me.

At the same time, I was also trying to write songs in the mold of John Lennon and David Bowie, all these people I heard on a regular basis at my house. That was the roots of what I was trying to write like.

When did you start to take playing music a little more seriously?

I kept playing; I was playing in bands all that time. There was never a time when I wasn't playing music. I graduated high school in 1988, but I think when things really clicked was maybe a year out of high school. A friend of mine who was friends with Jack (Yarber) introduced me to Jack. Actually,

he had gone to see a movie with Jack and his girlfriend on a double date. This guy was Terry Tate; he was my roommate, and he said to me, "I went out and saw a movie with this guy last night; he likes all the same kind of crap you like. You guys should get together and play some music." So I think we got together once with Terry who played drums with us. But that didn't really work out because Terry was more into a pop-funk sound that was kind of popular at the time. So that didn't work out so well, but Jack and I hit it off, and we kept trying various lineups. We would recruit pretty much anybody who would play with us.

There were a couple of stoner guys who lived in Jack's building; we got them. One guy, Boyd, was a bongo player! We got him to play drums with us. Boyd's stoner friend, who didn't even really play an instrument, we got him to play bass. We would play songs and record them. We did a demo tape with that lineup. I can't even remember what we

were calling that band. We've toyed with releasing those things over the years, but I don't know, they're pretty bad. [laughs] I can say when I met Jack, I felt like I had a real cohort that I could bounce ideas off of. Things took a more serious turn at that point.

So how did The Compulsive Gamblers get together?

The Gamblers came after a band we had called The Painkillers, which was our first real band we had that we played shows with. It's kind of blurry, but that was probably 90 or 91. Our first EP came out; we recorded that sometime in 91. Jack and I lived

together and recorded over in our apartment on Madison. We had a big kitchen, and we set up all the gear and recorded all of that stuff in there.

Most of those Gamblers' recordings didn't surface until later, correct?

Yeah, Sympathy (For the Record Industry) released them later. We released two seven-inchers. We released one ourselves (Joker seven-inch). Our friend put out the other one (Church Goin seven-inch). [Note: The Goodtime Gamblers seven-inch would later be released in 1995.]

The bands went on a little longer and we made some more recordings, but we didn't have any money to do anything with them. When we got The Oblivians going, after we did a couple Oblivians records, I approached John and said, "You know, we had this other band before that had a couple EPs but there is a lot more material, and if you want to do a retrospective CD or something, it'd be great to have this stuff put out."

John said, "Yeah, I'd be interested." And I said, "How much will you give us for it?" He's like, "I'll give you three hundred dollars." [laughs] Which obviously didn't even cover what it cost recording all that junk. At that time, I had almost written it off as things that were never going to get released anyway, and three hundred dollars covered some photos and paying a friend of ours to write the liner notes.

While the band was around, where did The Compulsive Gamblers play shows?

We mainly played around Memphis, but we did venture down to Louisiana a couple times and Mississippi. We played places that were close enough to be little weekend trips. We didn't travel very far.

There was a band that came through town and bought one of our EPs, and they were really into it and were courting us, wanting to put out an LP by us on their label, but it never happened.

They were doing a big show in Chicago, it



was a Ticketmaster event so there were, like, real tickets, which was a big deal for us. Then I found out that something came up, and we weren't going to be able to play the show. That would've been our biggest show, furthest from Memphis. There were tickets printed with our name on them. I still have one ticket.

How serious were you and Jack Yarber about playing music and recording?

We were just really into doing what we were doing. I was very serious about making good art. That was the extent of it. I wasn't serious about wanting to make a lot of money, or wanting to move to Nashville and get clicked into the industry or anything like that, but we were both really passionate about what we were doing. I don't think either one of us had any illusion that we'd ever be anything but a limited-appeal type item. At that point, I was aware of a lot of other bands that were mining the same territory as us, and none of them were making a million bucks, and I didn't see any reason why I would be. At best, I just wanted to be able to make records that would rub shoulders with those records and be available to the same crew of crazy people who were buying these things. There was no

motivation for me to do anything but that.

How did you wind up recording the Creep City (1993) album with Casey Scott for Capitol Records?

I went up to New York to work on the record with her. She was a friend of a friend. The Compulsive Gamblers bass player at the time was Fields Trimble, and Fields was

Casey's college roommate. When Casey came down to Memphis, she had already been signed to Capitol Records, and she was just hanging out. She came to see us play a couple times and approached me after a show and said, "Man, I really like the way you play guitar. Do you want to come to New York and help me make this record? I just signed a deal with Capitol, and I need to make this record, but I don't have a band." I said, "Yeah, that sounds like fun." So I did it.

After your stint in New York you returned to

Memphis. What did you do when you got back in town?

Not long after that I came back, and we did a few Gamblers things. Then Jeff Evans needed a drummer at the last minute for this tour he was doing with 68 Comeback. That was a two-month tour, so that was one long junket after another for me with those things. And without me around, it was kind



of hard for The Gamblers to play shows. Eventually the band just deteriorated. Also, our drummer moved to live where his girlfriend lived, and our violin player Greg Easterly moved down to New Orleans with his wife to open a clothing store. It seemed that the whole thing was drifting, and I felt something else would come up soon. But we were in the middle.

After The Gamblers were finished, how did The Oblivians start up?

While I was out playing with Jeff Evans, Jack had started playing with Eric and this other guy whose name I cannot remember, but he lived in the same apartment as me and Jack, and that guy had a band called The Pump Action Retards. Anyway, Jack, Eric, and this other guy, who was probably playing drums, they had started jamming around. They had one show and Jack always acted as if it was a catastrophe. The name of the band was The Gold Diggers.

Not long after I got back to town, Jack said, "Hey, I've been playing with Eric. We had this drummer guy, but he's kind of an alcoholic, and it's not working out." I said, "I just played drums for two months, I got my skills now." So we went over to Shangri-La Records where Eric was working, and in the evening after the store closed, we'd go in the back room and play music.

At first, I was just going to play drums, then I had a song, so Jack said, "I'll play drums and you play guitar." Then we got it to where it was rotating nicely.

Eventually, pretty quickly,

maybe a month's time, we scraped up enough songs between the three of us to do some recording, which became the first set of singles and the first album.

What sessions were the On the Go tracks from?

Those were the demos that were actually recorded at Shangri-la, just live recordings which we put out as a cassette. It was our first release. One side was us, the other side was an instrumental surf band that Scott Bomar had called Impala.

How big, or small, was The Oblivians' local following?

We had a small following in Memphis. I would not say that it was a lot of people. It was definitely a group of all of our friends who were all into the same stuff, and people who just liked to get drunk and party. Those kind of people will listen to pretty much



anything as long as it's not terrible. [laughs]

You got to pull in all your music geek fans and your non-stop party people, and soon you got a little scene going. We could always count on fifty or sixty people at a show. It wasn't bad. As time went on, over the course of three years or so, it got to be bigger, but never a lot bigger, in Memphis. It got to be where we could draw a couple hundred people. It was always amazing when we'd go out of town, to Chicago or somewhere, and play to five hundred people. We'd be like, "Wow! Why are there five hundred people here?"

But it was a total hit or miss thing because then we'd play in Atlanta to like five people, so we just never knew. Until the end when we had three records out, by then we had built up a fan base.

What bands did The Oblivians often play with?

We played with The Royal Pendeltons. They'd come up from New Orleans and play with us a lot. We'd play with Impala. And if there were any bands passing through town that were into the same stuff, like The Hentchmen, who put out their first single not long after The Oblivians put out the first single. The Hentchmen are a great band; we'd hook up with them, they'd come down and play in Memphis. You just kind of put out your feelers. Singles were really big at the time; a lot of bands were putting out their own singles. When you heard something that really grabbed you, you'd contact them and say, "Hey, we play rock music like you're playing, if you want to come here and play a show we'll book you something. Probably get you a hundred dollars and some beer, a little pizza or something."

Did you have much to do with trying to get The Oblivians on Crypt or any of the other labels?

That was more Eric. You should talk to him about that. He was more focused on people putting out the records. I was just focused on trying to write songs. Eric worked at a record store, so he knew all the labels and stuff.

Going from The Gamblers to the Oblivians, did you intentionally change your songwriting style?

I didn't try to change my writing style, but we limited our sound. We went from a band that had two guitars, drums, bass, organ, violin, saxophone and trumpet; towards the end, we had a pretty big band. We basically peeled it back to two guitars and not even a full drum kit, it was a floor tom and snare. When you do that, you're automatically simplifying. You're pulling it down to the bare essentials. When you do that, everything becomes a little more primitive. Once we started playing together and we got a feel for what kind of chemistry that was, then that creates its own sound. Once we got the feel of what it was going to sound like with just the three of us, we'd write in that context.

Eric had just started playing guitar, the whole thing was just kind of simple and primitive, and we were all Bo Diddley fans so you could feel this was closer to Bo Diddley than Bob Dylan.

We had gone from being some sort of a rootsy bar band to some primal thing. Although I didn't intentionally change my song-writing style, it naturally changed due to the circumstances. You work within the medium.

What is one of your fondest memories of playing in The Oblivians?

The first tour of Europe with The Country Teasers was probably one of my favorite things. Even though we didn't have a lot of money and it was miserable at points, we

had a lot of fun, fun because The Country Teasers were a hilarious bunch of guys. They had an incredible sense of humor between them; it made it a sort of surreal experience. Some of the shows on that tour were good turnouts, some not so much. It was up and down, every country was a little different.

The second thing for me was when we cut the record with Quintron (Play 9 Songs). We had been playing as just this little three piece, it was really interesting to bring in another instrument because it opened everything up. All of a sudden, what had been really primitive before was still primitive, but we could expand the barriers just a little and bring in more melody and flush out the bottom end. We had no bass, but the organ could cover the low end. We were like, "Well, we can progress outside of this a little bit, and then stop there. There isn't too much further we can go with this vehicle." It was a good note to end on.

It would be hard to go back. That is the thing with music, either you are going to continue to progress, or you're going to stop where you are and say, "OK, this is the sound." But as man says, "Don't ever look back, because you can't go back there." Once you've stepped outside, all you can do is pretend to go back; you can't really *do* it. The Stones release an album every ten years or so, and they think they're going back, but they are really not. [laughs]

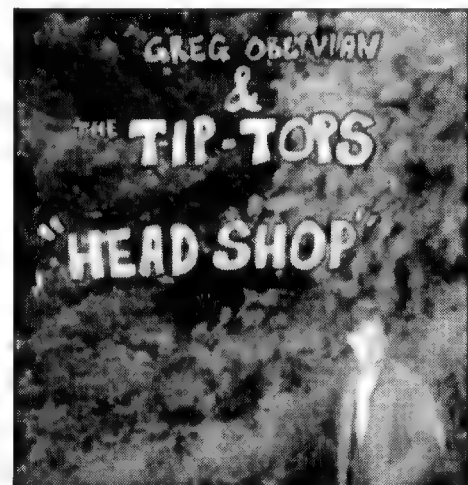
What did you do after The Oblivians called it quits?

The Oblivians ended, and we did The Gamblers again, for awhile. First we did an album called Bluff City (1999). Then we did another one called Crystal Gazing, Luck Amazing (2000) — the band had broken up by the time the record came out — but we recorded it and did a small tour. Then that kind of folded. Jack started working on

other stuff and, as a pair, we had gone about as far as we could go. It was time for both of us to stretch out a little. Jack knew what he wanted to do, and I kind of knew what I wanted to do, and it didn't sound much like anything that I had been doing before. We were both looking to stop and collect ourselves and figure out what we wanted to do next.

How did Reigning Sound form after The Compulsive Gamblers broke up for the second time?

I had a handful of songs ready for some kind of project. My wife Esther and I did a record called Greg Oblivian and the Tip Tops [1997]. It was just some demos and things, some four-track stuff we had been working on. Then I met the original drummer, Greg Roberson, and he had not played drums in ten years or something, but he was thinking about playing again. He was calling me a lot saying, "Hey man, you need to start doing something, you need to get another band together, and I want to play for you." So I said, "OK, Esther has been playing with me, but she has work and other commitments.



So, yeah, let's do it."

We did that for awhile. Then Greg [Roberson] was more of the kind of person

who was on the Internet, looking around in musician chat rooms and things like that, which I think is how he came into contact with Jeremy Scott, or on a website or something. I think Jeremy basically said he was new to town and looking for people to play with, and he listed some of the music he was into.

Greg [Roberson] said, "I talked to this guy a couple times over the phone, and I think it might be a good match. He's [Jeremy] from New Jersey; he just moved here [to Memphis] and he's into a lot of the stuff you're into. He likes Gene Clark and The Byrds, 1910 Fruitgum Company." It just kind of clicked, you know? He was into cool rock 'n' roll music. We made an appointment with him to meet us at this house to get together and play. I think it was me, Greg, Jeremy, and my friend Tim, who had also just recently moved to Memphis. We all played and maybe did one show with Tim playing with us. But Tim was chasing his own thing, trying to get his music going.

Then my friend Lorette Velvette [of The Hellcats] moved back to town with her husband, who was Alex Greene. They moved right across the street from me because they called and said, "Hey, we're moving back to town, we need a place." I told them there was a place right across the street, it's available. I knew Alex played keyboard and guitar, so when he moved back I said, "You should come over, we got this little thing going with Greg and Jeremy and me." He came in and started playing keyboard with us, and it just seemed like a great fit. I said, "Well, maybe you could trade back and forth, play a little guitar and a little organ." We got it going and pretty soon we had enough songs, so I contacted [Long Gone] John at Sympathy and told him, "I have this new band and some songs. I think I could get this whole thing wrapped up for about eight hundred dollars." He

agreed, so we did it. It went pretty quick. Not long after that, we had enough stuff for another album, so we did another [Too Much Guitar!] and then things chugged along pretty well.

What do you think inspired the transformation into that first Reigning Sound LP, were you listening to a lot of Byrds at the time?

I was listening to a lot of things like that, but at the same time, you can have all the influences in the world, but what determines what a band sounds like, whether it's The Reigning Sound, or The Gamblers or The Oblivians, is the chemistry that those people make together. Once you start playing and you see what kind of groove everybody locks into best, that determines the course, that's how you figure it out. It's like, I have these songs, and I can go any which way from Sunday, but this is the dynamic at which that these four people are best.

So would you say your songwriting is heavily influenced by the other members in the band?

Absolutely, I write the songs, but which direction the songs take is really about the players. It's the difference between me doing "Stormy Weather" and John Coltrane doing it. Neither one of us wrote it, but the instrumentation and the way the people play it determine whether it's blues or a jump song. Unless you're the type of band that get together strictly for the purpose of playing Ramones-style things, but I've never been in a band like that. I've always gotten into situations with people who are into all kinds of good music, then when you play together, you put all of those influences into the band, sift it and see what's left. [laughs]

How often do you write songs?

I'd say slightly less than I was a few years ago. But when things slow down enough for me to write, then I write a lot. I've got

three kids, and family life takes up so much of your time when you get older that sometimes you just don't have time. So, toward the end of last year, I decided to quit my day job — I was doing electrical work — to focus more on songwriting again.

Is there a process to your song writing?

I just go out in my garage and grab a guitar. Usually I write on the acoustic; sometimes I write on the electric, but that's rare. I just strum chords I like, and hum until I'm humming a melody, and I've found a nice chord change. Then I think, "Well, OK, this chord change works, is this a chorus or is this a verse?" Then I try to find a complimentary melody to set next to it. Then I start to think about the lyrics, asking myself, "What is this one going to be about?" Well, usually the tone of a chord change pretty much sets the mood. So you already have a mood, you know if you're going to be writing about something happy or sad, exciting or telling a story — the music dictates that already.

You tend to write a lot of lyrical bummers. Is that intentional?

That's kind of what I'm good at! [laughs] I'm a big record collector and music geek. I'm a fan of all these people like Harry



Nilsson, Gene Clark, and Dion. All these people who have great range, ten-octave voices and stuff, but I don't have any of that. But at the same time, the world is lousy with perfect singers. You can turn on American Idol and every one of them is pitch perfect. And not very interesting. But what I really like is someone who can raise emotion and can write a lyric that makes you feel that you can relate to that. Whether it's something general or super specific, either way.

When it comes to the kind of singers that I like, I like people who can sing like a bird, but I like people like Dylan as well. With Dylan, it's not how well he sings, it's the charm of how he sings. I don't sound anything like him, but that's kind of where I'm at. I don't have a whole lot of range, but the thing about people who don't have a lot of range is that they usually sing in a peculiar kind of way. They don't have the

range; it makes them work a lot harder to hit the notes, which, in turn, makes them sound like they're in pain. That lends itself to heart-breaking songs.

Are your lyrics inspired by your life, or are they just stories?

I can't really write outside of what I know, not convincingly. Everything I write about is either about me or something that happened to someone I'm really close to. For the most part, it has to be something that happened to me, something I've thought about a lot, or something I've felt. Most of it concerns things that have happened to me. Life gives you plenty of fodder for being sad.

Unfortunately, right?

Well, no, fortunately in my case! [laughs]

How would you describe the new Reigning Sound album, Love & Curses?

I don't know! [laughs] You're going to have to listen to it and tell me. There is a bit of everything. There are some ballads; I really like those. There are some rockers, and some things that are a little country flavored. But there are also some things that are angsty and punk. There are happy songs that are about being glad for what you got, and there are songs about being sad for what you don't have. It's a mixed bag. I don't know what to compare it to as far as things I've already put out — except it sounds very much like me. So if you like what I do, there is something on there for you.

How long did Reigning Sound spend recording the new record?

Too long. We recorded some songs in Memphis. I wanted to record at my buddy Doug Easley's studio, but then his studio burned down. He started up a new studio, but his tape machine broke on him. So we

went to Memphis and recorded with him anyway, but we did it at Ardent Studios. Which — Doug is awesome, he did a great job — but the tape machine was not calibrated right, and we had some problems with mixing and with the recordings. Once we cut everything to tape, we took it to another room to mix it, and it was really distorted because of the mis-calibration. That was really disheartening. But we mixed it anyway because I didn't have any choice, and I was paying thousands of dollars to do it. I think I tried to overcompensate for how fuzzy it was by making it cleaner, and it came off feeling a little sterile to me, so I was disappointed with the whole thing.

Then we tried to record again here in Asheville at a studio called Echo Mountain, with that I got some great results, we got about three or four songs. So I said, "I like this, I want to go back there and do some more." So I went back about a year later and cut some more songs there. I needed a place like that, and nobody had that here in Asheville. Then Echo Mountain opened up and it was like an answer to my prayers. It's an all-analog studio with great equipment. So everything worked out great. The resulting album is mostly the Echo Mountain stuff, peppered with a few things from the Easley/Ardent session that I really liked. Hopefully, it will all mesh together nicely, but the album is made up of three different sessions. I think it all falls together pretty nicely.

Lance Wille has been drumming for Reigning Sound for quite some time now, but this will be the first studio album he has played on, right?

There was a stop-gap album that came out in between Too Much Guitar! [May 2004] and this record. That was Home For Orphans [September 2005]. It was just odds-and-ends; Lance was on a track or two on that. Lance also did singles and things, also the Mary Weiss record. But this will be the

first Reigning Sound album with Dave Gay on bass, Lance Wille on drums, and Dave Amels on piano and keyboards.

How was it adjusting to not being in Memphis while recording an album?

I longed to be in Memphis and be comfortable, but when I tried to do that, it didn't work the way I thought it would. I think once I came to grips with the fact that now I live in Asheville, and I did the recordings here and were so happy with them, I realized this is my home now, and that I'm usually most comfortable when I'm at home. I like to work in analog and stay analog the whole process. I don't go to Pro Tools or voice correction programs — it is what it is when you get a Reigning Sound album. It's pretty much all analog; there are not a lot of studio tricks.

How did the 2009 Oblivians and Gories reunion come to be?

The first person who brought the idea of doing some shows and the European tour to my attention was Peggy O'Neill [Gories drummer]. But then Peggy claims it was Eric who brought it to her attention. So I

don't know where the real genesis of it is. But the first person who talked to me about this at any length was Peggy.

I just totally jumped on her bandwagon. I

was like, "That would be great! It'd be really fun." The Oblivians have done a reunion, but The Gories have not. There are thousands of people out there who would kill to see them because they never had the chance to do so.

I think it will be really fun; I think it will be better than

old times. I'm not looking to relive any glory days [laughs], but I am looking forward to getting together with a bunch of friends. I'm good friends with all of them.

After all these years, how will it be to work with your old band mates?

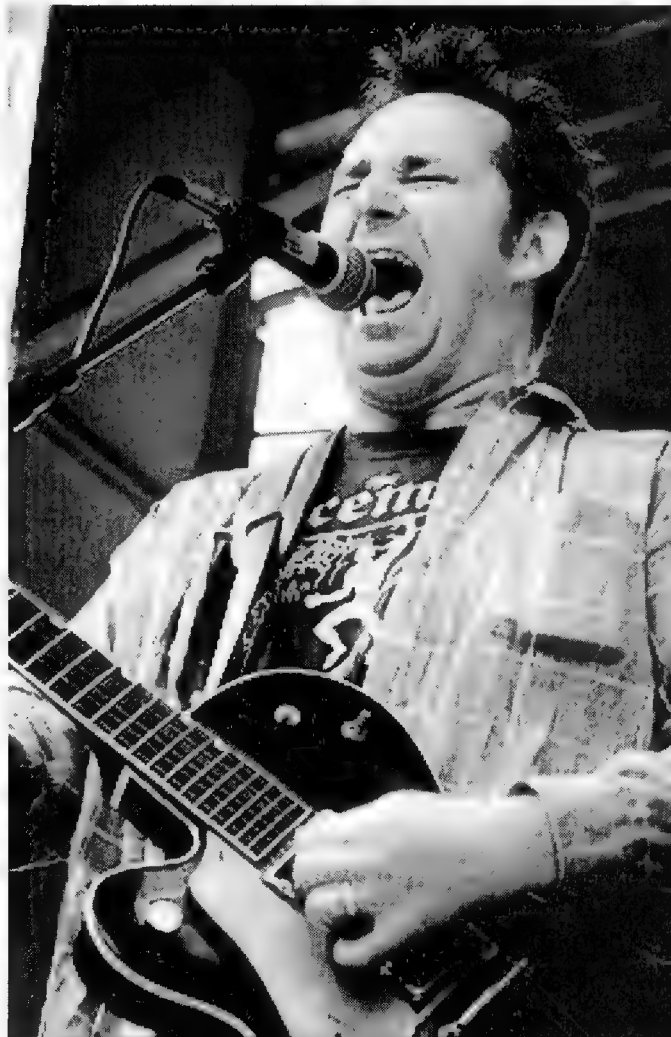
After The Oblivians folded, there were some tense times between us. We had spent so much time together, you start to grind on each others' nerves. It was like a mixed blessing when the band ended. Eric and I were just about at each others' throats. That doesn't mean either of us were wrong or bad people, it was just too much time together.



It happens with bands; it happened with The Gories. I'm sure there was a bit of bitterness when that band folded, and there was bitterness when The Oblivians folded. The great thing about time passing is that you get to put that stuff behind you and learn how to be friends with that person all over again, and how to appreciate them for what they are.

What allowed everyone in The Oblivians to bury the hatchet was our putting together

this reunion tour. When we started having rehearsals and I said, "Man! We have chemistry' this is fun!" You start appreciating what the people do for your music and what you can do for their music. That's really cool. It creates a chemistry. When a friendship ends, you just have that lasting bitter taste, that memory about what it is that irks you about that person. You don't remember the good things. You really need to be reintroduced and see why you were friends with that person to begin with.





BY STEVE GRIFFIN

Donny was my first good friend. He was my age. He lived next door. And we were in the same grade at St. Joseph's Catholic school. His family was as Catholic as mine but for some reason there were only two kids in that gray imitation brick house next door while there were seven kids in the brown imitation brick house I lived in. Donny always had new clothes and a new bike, but none of that really mattered then. His family also had the money to build a new house on the edge of town. So, when we were eleven years old, Donny moved to the last house on the last street on the north end of town. His side yard had a patch of mowed lawn that abruptly became a field of long grass and that field eventually became woods.

It was a fairly small town so the edge wasn't that far away, although it seemed like it then. A ten-minute bike ride would get me to that new, actual brick, one story, ranch-style house - with all new furniture. It was 1957.

There were some other newer houses on the street closer to town, and there was an old dilapidated house almost directly across the street. That was the original farmhouse that once stood alone in what was now rapidly becoming a field of houses. All the while Donny's house was being built we dug caves in the dirt mounds, climbed in and out of the open basement and assumed that the old house across the street was empty. It wasn't until Donny moved in that we saw life in that house.

One day there was an old man standing in the doorway. And it wasn't just any old man. It was the Caser! The Caser was the first

town character I ever really noticed. I'm sure there were others, but he was the most visible character on the streets of that small town. He was very tall and thin with long white hair and a long white beard. I thought he was the model for the Uncle Sam posters I had seen at the post office. That image was further enhanced by the fact that he always wore pants with vertical red and white stripes. We gave him that name because all he did was "case" the streets looking for change, always with his head down drifting from one parking meter to the next, hoping to find a coin or two that someone had dropped and was too lazy to pick up. I hadn't seen him in a year or more and assumed that he had died or moved to another town, but what probably happened is that he made enough money selling building lots in his field to make up for a hundred years of casing. Although he sure didn't spend it on fixing up his house or investing in a new pair of pants. The Caser could be spotted on rare occasions just standing in his doorway, in those patriotic pants, arms folded.

The concept of interior design never crossed my mind until I first stepped foot in that new house on the edge of town. The entryway was separated from the living room by a divider made of small shelves filled with glass knickknacks through which I could see a long U-shaped turquoise couch. The living room itself was very open with a large modern fireplace at the far end. Over the couch hung a huge mirror that reflected the view seen through the bay window on the opposite wall. And, of course, there was a color television. The kitchen was equipped with all of the modern

appliances, including a dishwasher, and a very modern looking oval red and gray Formica table with matching chairs. From then on I was painfully aware of the mismatched chaos I was living in at home. And, until then, I was never bothered by the fact that our TV was only black and white.

Among all of those new pieces of furniture there was one that we both coveted the most — a sleek-looking console record player that played 78s, 45s and our favorite 33 1/3 LPs — in stereo! Donny was “hip” to the latest music. He had piles of Elvis and Everly Brothers records, but his favorite musician was Duane Eddy. That was a bit of a mystery to me since Duane Eddy never sang — he just played the electric guitar, a relatively new invention at the time.

I was in the same classroom as Donny. We had the same nuns for teachers. We both heard those nuns warn us against the evils of modern rock and roll music, yet he was allowed to buy those records “touched by Satan” and I wasn’t. He was also allowed to let his hair grow. Donny also wanted to look like Duane Eddy with a long on top flipped-up hairdo. He was constantly combing it. His mother, who we considered an old lady, was probably in her early thirties at the time and I realize now that she was the rebel influence in the family. Donny’s father was a truck driver so he was on the road most of the time. When he was at home everyone just stayed out of his way.

Although I did occasionally listen to rock and roll

on the radio, I was subjected to Perry Como and Peggy Lee at home (on our piece of junk Hi-Fi). I did find one singer in my father’s collection that I listened to over and over again. That was Frankie Laine. He had a deep solid voice that could blast all of those other singers out of the water, but I was soon banned from playing Frankie Laine records on Donny’s Stereophonic record player.

It was one of those slow summer days in what seemed then to be endless summer vacation.



Steve Griffin 2010

Those lazy days were filled with finding new ways to get out of doing “chores,” which was still much preferred over finding new ways to get out of doing homework. The chore that day was to cut down some of that long grass in the field beside the house and burn it. Although it was really Donny’s chore, I would usually end up helping out. My attempts to hang out at Donny’s house to avoid my own list of chores often backfired.

Before leaving for town, his father gave Donny a sickle and a rake and

said he wanted the job done by the time he got home. We decided to work fast so we could get back to our more valuable chore-less time. We took turns with the sickle, me swinging away singing “Rawhide,” and Donny humming “Forty Miles of Bad Road.”

It wasn’t long before we had raked up a pile of grass that was much taller than we were. Donny took a book of matches out of his pocket and tried to light the mound of grass by just throwing lit matches at the pile expecting it

to burst into flames. But when that failed, he attempted to light the fire by holding a match to individual blades of grass until he burned his fingers. Nothing was working. But his father did instruct him to burn it, and Donny always did exactly what his father told him to do. Too often he had felt the sting of his father's belt. At least that was one thing I was glad I didn't have at my house.

After the flaming bunched-up newspapers also failed, there was only one thing left. Gasoline! As Donny returned from the garage with the red metal can in hand, I'm sure we were both thinking that this probably wasn't such a good idea. But I'm sure his father's voice was loud and clear in his head. He did want it burned.

With each splash Donny shook from the gas can, I took one more step back. After all this was his job, not mine. Donny set the can down

slowly but before I could tell him to step back too he had already struck the match. Suddenly there was a very loud muffled explosion and, for just a few frozen moments, I saw a large shaggy green cloud of grass suspended in the sky that looked like it was hovering just above the Caser's house across the street. I could also see the Caser standing in the doorway, in his flag pants, arms folded, eyes slightly raised toward the strange cloud.

There were no flames as the green bundle fell back to earth with a soft thud, still intact. But there was smoke. I will always remember the stunned look on Donny's face as he slowly turned around, his eyes wide open, with a whisper of smoke where his eyelashes and eyebrows once were, the match still smoldering in his hand. But most of the smoke billowed from the singed remains of what was once a perfect Duane Eddy hairdo.



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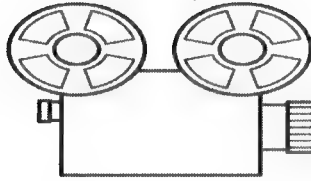
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The Last of the Independents:

Film Producer Richard Gordon

by Keith Crocker

The interview you are about to read was conducted with Producer/Distributor Richard Gordon in Spring of 1995 for the Exploitation Journal (Issue 2/3, Vol II). Richard Gordon is a British-born American-based producer and distributor of horror and exploitation films. His late brother, Alex Gordon, relocated to California and helped to form American International Pictures. Richard stayed in New York and ran Gordon Films from his office on 58th St. As a producer, Richard Gordon is responsible for such blood and boob classics as Horror Hospital (with Michael Gough) and Tower of Evil (With Bryant Haliday). As a distributor, he gave us The Playgirls and the Vampire and Cave of the Living Dead (With Adrian Hoven). I became aware of Richard Gordon in the 1970's when his theatrical films

began their second life via public TV showings. During the 1990's, his product had a third life on video tape. In the 2000's, his work reappeared

again thanks to DVD, a medium he prefers as he feels it gives accurate representation to the production values that can be found in his films. Although the last film Gordon produced was Horror Planet (1981), Gordon continues to dip his feet in the business by consistently keeping his product available via the various home entertainment formats, and he loves to talk about his work and his passion for Cinema, hence the various commentaries he does for DVD's of his product. Now, kick your feet back, grab a cup of

coffee, and get ready to time travel back to 1995 for a taste of Richard Gordon and what was going on in his world back then.



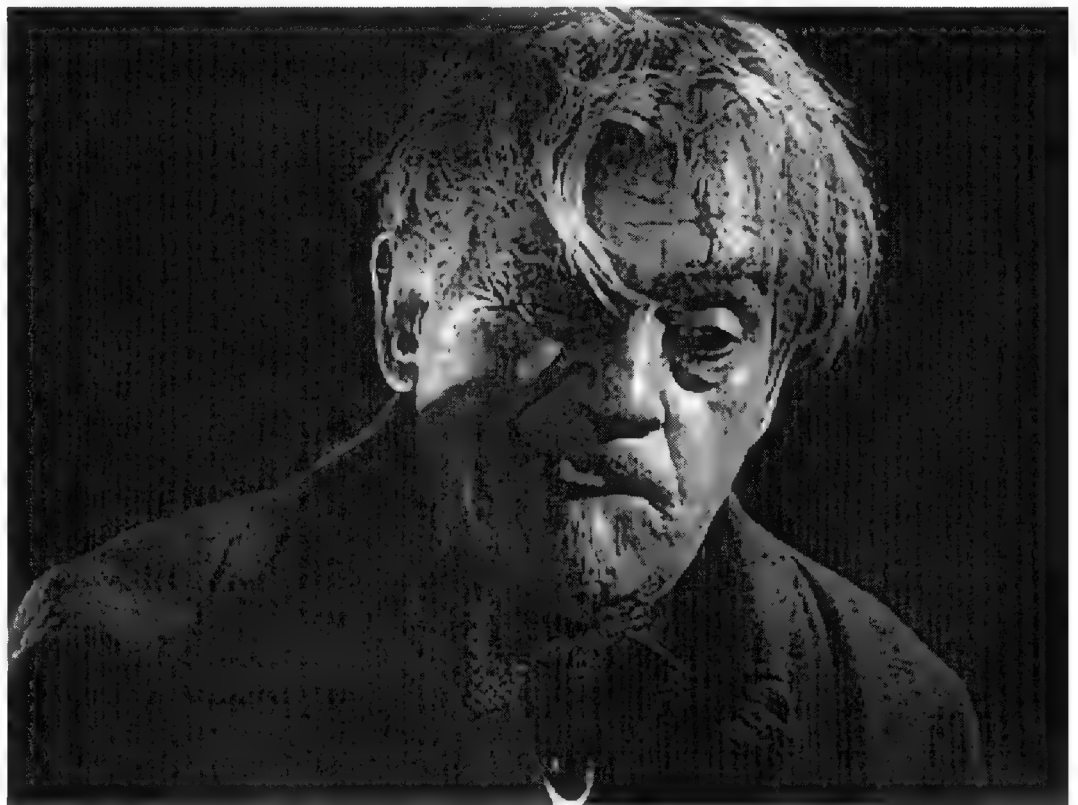
Brutarian: How did you first get involved in films?

Richard Gordon: When I came out of the service during the second world war, I got into distribution. First, I got into publicity and advertising in London. Then I came to the U.S. in 1947. I got into distribution by representing producers in England and other countries who wanted to sell their films in the United States. After a while, they were asking me to also become involved in helping them set up co-productions and securing American artists to go to England and play in the pictures. So, I was doing that for a couple of years, and then decided that if I could do it for other people, then I should be able to do it for myself. So, I went over and first started by making a series of co-productions with other English companies. They were sort of action/adventure pictures. I did two pictures with Zachary Scott, and I did one with Wayne Morris, Richard Denning, and people like that. I decided to form my own company, Producers Associates Limited, and go into production for myself. I was fortunate to be able to get Boris Karloff for the first film that I did, *The Haunted Strangler*, which was done back to back with *Fiend Without A Face*.

When you left the service, were you actively headed for a career in films?

Yes, this was something that my brother and I had always wanted to do as kids. We were running fan clubs, and when I was in the service, I ran a film society for the Navy, and we used to put on film shows at sea. My brother ran a film society, then he formed a Gene Autry fan club. We were always interested in the film business. He went into the Army, I went into the Navy, and we both came to America at the same time. He moved on to California while I stayed here, and he eventually wound up producing pictures at American International.

Are you partial to the horror genre?



Yes, Alex and I were drawn to the genre, even as kids. There was a problem in England because with the censorship regulations of the time, most of the horror



picutres were banned for children under sixteen. Maybe that's what attracted us to them. We became interested in horror films at an early age, so when we came to the States, we started writing articles for English fan magazines. They had asked us, when we got to the U.S., to do some interviews and stuff like that. That's how I met Boris Karloff, who was appearing in a play called *The Linden Tree*, and we met Bela Lugosi, who was touring in *Arsenic and Old Lace* in summer stock in the New York area. The practical reason for concentrating on horror films when I got into my own production was initially that it was a genre that the majors, in those days, were not exploiting very much. Secondly, it was a genre in which you did not necessarily need to have big star names or big production values to get by, as long as you had the horror, the thrills, and reasonable special effects when it came to science fiction, as in *Fiend Without A Face*. You could make the

movies low budget, and there was always a market for that, whereas if you attempted a drama or comedy and it didn't work, or didn't have big names, you could get stuck with it on the shelves.

Tell us about the production of *The Haunted Strangler* with Boris Karloff.

Well, due to the interviews that we did with Karloff, I got to know him, and he got to know what my ambitions were and what I wanted to do. One day, he gave me a screen treatment called *Stranglehold* which was written for him by a friend of his, a writer in England whom I got to know subsequently, Jan Read, who wrote quite a lot of films. Karloff asked me if I thought that it could be set up in England, and I said I was quite sure it could if he was prepared to commit to it. He said to me, "If you want to get into production, and if you can set it up, I'll do it." Well, that was an offer I couldn't refuse. So, I went over to England and made a deal

with a company called Eros Films, which agreed to put up part of the financing. I was able to raise the rest of the money over here on Karloff's name; he was under contract to Kock-Shenck Films at the time. He had just done Voodoo Island, but there was a break in between before he was due to do his next picture for them. I was able to set it up, and that's how I got started.

I found, as it was in those days, everything was double featured, unless you had a really big film. Both Eros and other people I spoke to said that you've got to have another feature to go with it, otherwise you split the program and split the income. Alex found me a story called "The Thought Monster," which we purchased. As a matter of fact, Forry Ackerman was the agent of the author. It was a short story that had been published in Weir Tales magazine in the 30s. He sent it to me and I liked it very much. We had it scripted, and that became Fiend Without A Face. Now we had our double bill. So, we made the two pictures back to back, virtually with the same technical unit, except for the director.

Both films are very gruesome. Did you run into any censorship problems?

Well, horror films in the 50s were beginning to go in that direction. If you remember with pictures like Blood Of The Vampire with Donald Wolfelt, and the early Hammer productions, the barrier sort of broke down. Thus, we felt that in order to compete we had to give our pictures a harder edge than they had in the 40s. We had some censorship problems. We didn't have many problems with Haunted Strangler, except that they wanted us to shorten one or two scenes — the hanging at the beginning and a couple of things like that, all of which we put back for the home video distribution. We did have a lot of trouble with Fiend Without A Face because the British censor did pass it with an X-certificate. It opened

in London, and the press was absolutely outraged. We received the most horrendous reviews, all of which concentrated on the film's bloodletting and gruesomeness. In fact, the controversy resulted with a question being asked in Parliament by some MP as to whether it wasn't time to review the British Board of Film censors themselves if they could allow a film like Fiend to pass review. All of this was great publicity; it only made more people go and see it. After I made the deal with MGM, we had to make some cuts in it over here for the MPAA to get the rating at the time. Again, the footage is now all intact in the video version.

The special effects in Fiend were very innovative.

At the time, they were considered very innovative and also very unusual. We found a German special effects team that came up with idea of doing them the way they did. I went to Munich and worked with them in their little studio on the special effects while the main unit was shooting. By today's standards, the effects are on the primitive side. I think in that particular film they still work because people regard it from a nostalgic standpoint. It wasn't that expensive to do at the time. This is the trouble today, and this is why I think anybody who is still in production is veering more towards horror than science fiction: special effects have become so state of the art that you can't get away with primitive effects anymore. They were unusual at the time, and we were lucky with them. They worked out very well. I had a number of approaches about remaking Fiend as a big picture in color, and from a personal standpoint, if someone would set up the production or finance it, I'd be very interested to do it. But what could you do with the film today? It would become something very different like the remakes of The Thing or The Fly and all those pictures. It would have to become a very gory and

very extravagant movie to compete in today's market. Really, all you'd be doing is selling the title, but the script would probably be totally different.

What came next, The Electronic Monster?

Electronic Monster was actually one of the co-productions I did prior to producing on my own. I had done two pictures with Zachary Scott, The Counterfeit Plan and Violent Stranger, together with Nat Cohen's Anglo-Amalgamated in England. He had another story which was originally called "Escapement" and had written a script from it called The Green Machine. I got involved in the co-production, and furnished Rod Cameron and Mary Murphy as the co-stars. When the picture was finished and I sold it to Columbia for distribution in the U.S., they retitled it The Electronic Monster. Again, there was the problem of finding a feature to go with it. I didn't have any other feature at the time, but I picked up a film called Woman Eater with George Coulouris and Vera Day.

The thing that came immediately after Haunted Strangler and Fiend Without A Face was the idea to do another picture with Boris Karloff because he was very pleased with the way Strangler turned out. We got off on the wrong track because, in the mistaken belief that Dracula was in the public domain, we talked to MGM about doing a color version of Dracula with Karloff. It was going to be in a completely different style than the Lugosi film. We then discovered that Universal owned the copyright in the United

States, although it was public domain in Europe, which meant that we couldn't have released it stateside. This discovery resulted in a frantic search for another vehicle for Karloff as there was a time limit. Karloff had to be back to Hollywood for another project.

We came up with Corridors Of Blood, and that was the next film that I did. The original idea was to do First Man Into Space to go with it as a double bill, but that was the time of the moon explorations, and all that, and MGM decided that there was no point releasing it as a double bill. They could go out with First Man Into Space on its own and cash in on all this publicity, so they released it by itself.

Did it do as well as they hoped?

It did well; it did better than it would have as just half of a double bill. But it didn't go through the roof like Destination Moon did



when George Pal did that picture. But it did very well. There was a sudden management change at MGM at that time. The new management came in and said that they weren't going to do those pictures and that sort of programming anymore. So, although they had money invested in it, they put *Corridors Of Blood* on the shelf, until a year or two later when they found themselves with a dubbed Italian picture *Werewolf In A Girl's Dormitory*. They decided to put that out as a double bill, but it didn't do well at all. First of all, the dubbed picture was dreadful, and the market was changing. MGM was changing. The whole thing didn't work as a double bill.

Corridors of Blood was an excellent gothic movie. It made a big impression on us.

The problem with *Corridors Of Blood*, and I think the reason it didn't work theatrically, was due to a sort of half and half. It wasn't really an out and out horror picture, it was something of a serious work about surgery before the days of anesthetics with a lot of documentary background. People who would normally go to see a picture like this stayed away. They said to themselves, "Corridors of Blood? Boris Karloff? It must be a horror picture." So, we kind of lost both audiences; it fell in the middle. There wasn't enough horror for the horror fans, and there was too much horror for more "serious" filmgoers.

In that movie, you had Christopher Lee in an early role as "Resurrection Joe."

I was very lucky with that. We were casting *Corridors Of Blood* and I was in London, and Hammer Films was making *Curse Of Frankenstein* with Christopher Lee. Jimmy Carreras, who I knew very well, and who had helped

me with casting on a couple of pictures, said, "You must look at the rough cut of *Curse Of Frankenstein* with Lee because after we put out this picture, he's going to be a big star." He said, "Right now, you can still get him on a reasonable deal, why don't you take advantage of it?" I looked at *Curse Of Frankenstein*; of course you couldn't judge too much on Lee in it, but I could see that this picture was going to be a big breakthrough. They had finished shooting so Lee was free, but they were still six months away from post production and delivering it to Warner Brothers. I was able to make a deal with Lee. The role of "Resurrection Joe" was really written into the script after we got Lee. We didn't want to give him a supporting role, we wanted to find something that justified it. That role, while it was there in a very minor capacity, was built up so that we could almost make it like sort of a co-starring vehicle. That was the only time I ever worked with Christopher Lee.

Corridors Of Blood had an excellent cast: Karloff, Lee, Adrienne Cori, Nigel Green, Francis Matthews . . .

. . . Francis Matthews, who I saw for the first time since 1958 at the Manchester Film



Festival. He's still very active on the stage and on television. He was very pleasant to work with, a charming guy. He has a grown-up son who is just starting an acting career.

We take it you liked working with Karloff.

He was a very sweet man, the complete antithesis of what he was on the screen. He was very gentle, a typical English country gentleman, interested in cricket, gardening, and things like that. He was extremely helpful to anyone who had less experience than he did. I couldn't find a nicer guy.

What about Christopher Lee?

I did not get along well with Christopher Lee. I thought that, even at that time, he was arrogant and difficult. On our first meeting, when we had a discussion about *Corridors Of Blood*, he made a remark about what his interpretation of the Frankenstein monster was going to prove against Karloff's representation, which, as far as I'm concerned, got us off on the wrong foot right away. I could never warm up to him. I found him a very difficult person. I haven't actually seen him since then.

The guy I very much regret not having worked with, who I think would have been as pleasant as Karloff, is Vincent Price. Anybody who ever worked with Vincent Price said that you couldn't have met a nicer guy.

First Man Into Space had Marshall Thompson as the star. Were you looking for an American marquee name?

We felt, as we did when we put Marshall Thompson in *Fiend Without a Face*, that we needed at least one American name in order to make things fly. We scripted *First Man Into Space* so that the whole story took place in the United States, even though it was shot in England. We needed American actors as often as we could get them.

Actually, I had a three-picture commitment with Marshall Thompson, and so after *First Man Into Space*, we had another picture to do. I did a small film with him called *The Secret Man*. It was sort of a spy thriller, not a horror film. It never played theatrically in the U.S.; it went straight to television.

Were you ever going to do a film with Bela Lugosi?

When we met Bela, who was touring in *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the time, I would have enjoyed working with him. But somehow the opportunity didn't come along, not until I set up for him, in 1951, a stage revival of *Dracula* in England. It was supposed to tour the provinces and then come into the West End of London. Unfortunately, the whole thing didn't work out well because the management in England spent no money on the rest of the production whatsoever, thinking all they had to do was say, "Bela Lugosi in *Dracula*" and everybody was going to come watch it. He was very unhappy with the show, the rest of the cast, and so on. In fact, the play closed before it ever came to the West End. That left Bela effectively stuck in London with his wife and really no money to come back home. I was still representing a producer by the name of George Minter whose pictures I was distributing in the United States. I persuaded him to do *Mother Riley Meets The Vampire*, but it was a terrible film. That, too, never worked out and never went anywhere. It did enable Lugois to return to Hollywood. Still, at that time, Bela's health was failing; he deteriorated quickly and so I never got the opportunity to do anything with him. My brother remained in contact with him and later did *Bride Of The Monster* with Eddie Wood.

How did you find Lugosi personally?

He also was a very charming and a very nice man, but he was difficult. He drank

a lot and he did have a drug problem, but it wasn't, at that stage, the drug problem that everyone associates with him now. He had a chronic stomach ailment, and he was taking morphine injections for it. His wife Lillian, the wife he had at the time when I knew him, had been a nurse and knew how to administer the injections for him. It was the drinking that was the problem at the time, not the drugs. He was somewhat resentful of Karloff's success because Karloff had done so much better than he, whereas Karloff wasn't in any way resentful of Lugosi. As a matter of fact, he felt sorry for Lugosi. The biggest problem with Bela was that he never got rid of his accent. I mean, he originally cashed in on it as Dracula and immediately after, but it limited him in Hollywood to playing only the heavies and sinister roles.



In the 60s, Bryant Halliday had many leading roles in your films. Were you trying to make a horror star out of him?

I knew Bryant, he was a stage actor originally, and then he was the founder of Janus Films, which imported Ingmar Bergman pictures. He also ran a theater in Cambridge, where they brought Shakespearean and theatrical companies from Europe to appear on stage. So I knew him on that side, but he had been acting in films in France as well, some of which I had seen. He wanted very much to do film. We were good friends, and when *The Devil Doll* came along, he seemed to me a very logical choice. We couldn't afford to go for a big star, so he agreed to do it, and we did it, and

it did extremely well. It opened immediately in England, so we were looking for another vehicle. Thus we did *Curse Of The Voodoo*, which didn't do quite as well. I had a very good relationship with him. When it came to *The Projected Man*, I thought it was logical to use him again, and he also did *Tower Of Evil*. By that time, it was mostly a case of using him for his name value because it was a part that anyone could have played. He eventually went back to France. In fact, he lives in Paris now. He didn't want to work anymore; he's retired now. He was doing stage and television work in France. He's completely bilingual; he spoke fluent French. As an aside, he dubbed his roles in *Tower Of Evil* and *Devil Doll* for the French

versions.

Tell us about Devil Doll.

A lot of people think that we stole it from Dead Of Night, the Michael Redgrave episode. In fact, "Devil Doll" was a story that was published in a magazine called London Mystery Magazine many years before Dead Of Night was even made. Of course, our film came out years after Dead Of Night, but if anything, maybe that film got its idea from that published magazine story. The idea of a ventriloquist whose personality or mind is taken over by the dummy, or who imagines he's bringing the dummy to life, has always been popular in movies. It goes back to The Great Gabbo with Eric Von Stroheim, but there's only so far you can go with it. There's a limit to how much interplay you can create between a ventriloquist and his dummy. The outstanding example in recent years was, of course, Magic with Sir Anthony Hopkins. I don't think it worked because Sir Anthony was the wrong guy to play it. It wasn't very successful.

At this time — 1963 — most British horror films were in color, while you were still shooting in black and white. Was this for budgetary reasons?

It was mainly for budget reasons because at the time, it was still much more expensive to shoot in color, and color printing was also so much more expensive. Now it's almost the other way around as black and white is so rare that it has become more expensive. We were still shooting in black and white, and I did one film which was at the tail end of the black and white cycle, which we had wanted to do in color: Naked Evil. It was eventually released [around 1973] here by Sam Sherman as Exorcism At Midnight. Naked Evil was originally a play called The Obi about voodoo and witchcraft, written by Jon Manchip White. It had been done on

television in England and we acquired the movie rights, which I did with Steven Pallos. Pallos got Columbia in England to finance it as a low budget movie to go on a double bill. Pallos and I wanted to make it in color, but Columbia said that they wouldn't pay for the color since it was only going to be part of a double bill. The other film would be some big film in color. In retrospect, we made the mistake of not putting up the money ourselves in order to have color. When I brought the picture to America to arrange the distribution for it, there really wasn't any interest, other than to go directly to television. Sam, who I knew was a very imaginative guy, came up with the idea of doing these color tints, and also retitling the picture and shooting additional footage. He did a whole number on it and retitled it Exorcism At Midnight. It really didn't work . . . well, let's just say it wasn't worth all the time and trouble. The next picture I did after that was Island Of Terror, and then, of course, from there on out, everything was in color.

Island of Terror was another impressive film. You had Peter Cushing in that.

By that time, we were working on bigger budgets. I had a financial partner in England for a while, Gerry Fernback, who was able to arrange more financing. Being able to get Peter Cushing and Terence Fisher, we tried to make a more elaborate picture. It has just been released on video by Universal. I must say, looking at the video, that I'm surprised how beautiful they make it look. They restored the color and it is really a first class job. I hope they'll do the same for The Projected Man as they have that, too. The two films went out on a double bill. Alan Ramsen wrote a screenplay which he called The Night The Silicates Came. Gerry Fernback received it from someone in London and sent it to me. I read it and, I must say, it was the only instance that I can remember

receiving a screenplay that somebody had written on speculation that not only had me enthusiastic but also had me ready to shoot. It was well-constructed and so we went right into it. And again, because it was a double-bill time around the world, theatrically, we felt we needed something to go with it. The Projected Man was a script I received from Alex in Hollywood. I was in the fortunate



position where, because he was working at AIP, he was seeing all the properties and scripts that were submitted to them. Anything they turned down, if he felt there was something that we could use, he would send it to me to read. It was written by an American called Frank Quattrocchi. It took place in the United States, and we had it rescripted and set in England. It seemed

like a suitable film to go with Island Of Terror.

Peter Cushing and Terence Fisher? Affable partners?

Terence Fisher was very difficult to get to know. I mean, he was extremely pleasant to work with, but he was very much withdrawn, very much a private person. He didn't really mix with anybody off the set, you know, when it wasn't necessary. At lunch time, he would simply lock himself into his office and prepare his shooting schedule for the afternoon or the next day. He was the ultimate pro and a wonderful guy with whom to work, but not a man with whom you could form a lasting relationship. He really didn't want to get involved with people.

Peter Cushing was more like Boris Karloff. He was a charming man, delightful guy with whom to work, very cooperative, very friendly. I did remain in contact with him for a bit afterwards. I was able to get him for Ken Wiederhorn, whom I knew from New York and Shock Waves. Ken was trying to get this picture off the ground and he couldn't get anybody to play in it. He tried for Peter Cushing but couldn't get past his agent. I was able to put him in direct contact with Cushing, and Ken sold him on the idea of a trip to Florida, all expenses paid, plus some fee for the film. They got along, and it worked out very well. Of course, getting John Carradine, I don't think was that much of a problem. Cushing was a wonderful guy, but then he had that tragedy when his wife died. He never recovered from that. He became interested in spiritualism and he tried to communicate with her. He would tell people he was just waiting to die so he could be reunited with her. Eventually he came out of

it, but he was never really a happy man after his wife's death.

Your next genre film was Tales Of The Bizarre (aka Secrets Of Sex).

I had become friendly with Anthony Balch, who was a film distributor and a theater operator in the U.K. I used to see him at The Cannes Film Festival every year. He was anxious to get into film production and do something. He had this idea of making an omnibus film which we called Secrets Of Sex. I went in with him on it, and we made it for peanuts. It did extremely well in England.

Was it released here?

It was released here very briefly as Bizarre by New Line Cinema, a company just starting out at the time. That's what gave us the idea of later retitling it Tales Of The Bizarre. The film had only a few bookings here. It really wasn't a film designed for the American market.

Was it a horror film or an erotic film?

It was a combination. Several of the stories were sex stories, of course. At that time, they weren't hardcore. The others were horror stories — comic and straight horror. After we retitled it Tales Of The Bizarre and made some cuts in it to get an R rating, it did go out through a company called Fanfare Films run by Joe Solomon, who was actually distributing through AIP. It went out as a second feature with different movies. The version approved by the MPAA is only seventy-three minutes, as opposed to the original ninety-minute version. There were a lot of bare breasts which, at that time, was enough to prevent you from getting a rating. It was the sex content, not the horror. When we retitled it and brought it down to a shortened form, it became more of a horror picture as the sexual element was largely

eliminated.

Now it's on to Tower Of Evil (aka Horror On Snape Island) and Horror Hospital.

Anthony and I did so well with Secrets Of Sex, and got along so well, that we decided to do another picture together, spend a little more money and try to make a movie that could play worldwide. We came up with the idea to do Horror Hospital. He pulled in a writer and friend of his, Alan Watson, an Englishman living in France, to do the screenplay, and we put that together.

Both films are very campy.

Tower of Evil is played absolutely straight, even though some of it might seem funny to an audience, especially today. It was intended as a straight horror picture with enough blood and guts to compete with a Hammer-type of picture. Horror Hospital is a spoof. It was intended as a send up, right from the get go. I think it worked very well. We had Michael Gough, who was a very good name for that part, and Robin Askwith, who was just perfect for the role that he played. It was extensively released here and all around the world.

Robin Askwith is an actor you don't hear much about in the U.S., but he's very popular in England, isn't he?

I met Robin Askwith when the casting director for Tower Of Evil sent a lot of actors to us; it's what they call a "cattle call." Robin was one of the people who came up and read for the part. Originally, we had thought of him in the role Gary Hamilton subsequently played, Brom. We didn't think Robin was right for that; we figured we needed a more ballsy kind of guy, so we cast him in the secondary role, playing one of the American kids. I thought he was very good, and we got along splendidly. He did a picture for Pete Walker called Cool It Carol,

and a couple of other things. When Anthony and I were talking about Horror Hospital, we thought he'd be ideal for it. He was very pleasant to work with, and he's still very successful in England. He does things on the stage like Run For Your Life, which are called bedroom farces. And he's toured in Australia and New Zealand.

Dennis Price is another interesting figure.

Dennis Price had been a big star in the 40s and 50s at Rank, and he really drank himself out of his career. He was a good name, and the truth of the matter was, he was available cheap, and he was easy to get for cameo roles. He was a delightful fellow to work with, as long as you could keep him sober. We found, particularly on Horror Hospital, that you really had to work with him in the morning because if he started on a few drinks at lunch time, it would be useless to try and do anything with him in the afternoon. When we did Horror Hospital, Anthony and I used to have to have lunch with him. We tried to keep an eye on him, but then he'd excuse himself to go to the men's room. We'd find that he had a bottle in this pocket and he was going to drink it somewhere in the men's room. Still, he was very cooperative and he was very appreciative. He was a really nice guy.

Was the lighthouse in Tower Of Evil real, or was it a set?

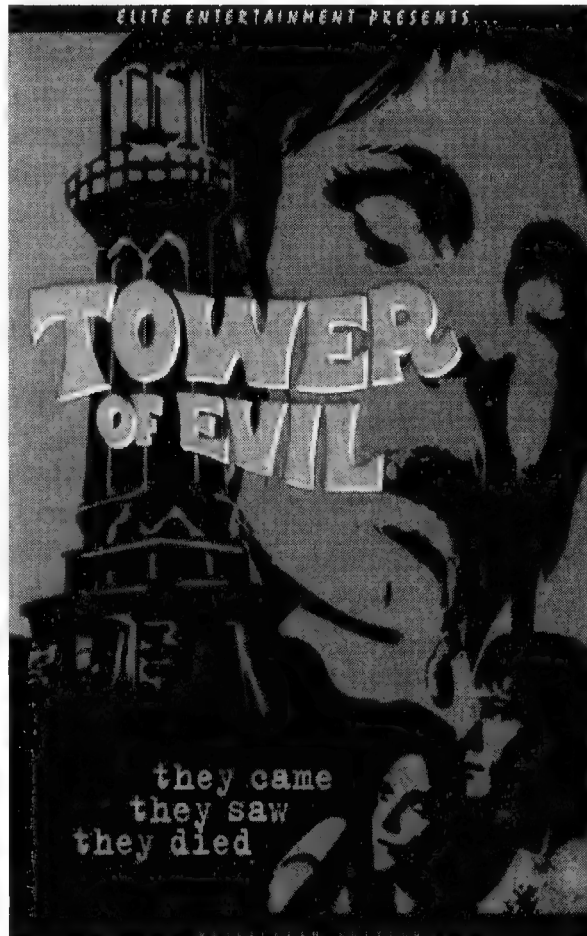
The lighthouse didn't exist, at least as a real lighthouse. The interiors, all the surroundings, in fact the whole picture, was shot at Shepperton Studios with the exception of the scenes on the boat when they go out to the island. The lighthouse

itself is a glass shot, a painting on a glass set against the background with water in front of it. Then there were some table-top miniatures; the explosion at the end was a table-top miniature. Even the approach of the boat to the island and the landing stage was all shot at Shepperton Studios. They had one stage that you could flood and use real water. It was all done there.

You shared part of your sets on the film with Milton Subotsky while he was filming an Amicus' anthology.

Milton, who I obviously knew

very well as we were both making the same kind of films at the same time and at the same place, was shooting something at Shepperton Studios. I believe it was one of his omnibus pictures. We had built some very extensive caves and underground sets. He asked me one day if he could use one of them, just for a quick shot that he needed, and then he gave me something in return. We swapped facilities. He was a very nice



guy. I liked him very much.

We heard his partner, Max J. Rosenberg, wasn't so agreeable.

Funny you should say that, as just six weeks ago I was at Max Rosenberg's eightieth birthday party. He's still living; he lives in California now, but they had his party here in New York. It depends on who you talk to and which side of the argument you hear. I knew Max long before I ever met Milton Subotsky. He's really a nice guy, a very intelligent guy. They just clashed over what they wanted to do, and took divergent paths.

They were both Americans. What made them come to England?

Max Rosenberg was involved with Jimmy Carreras in setting up Curse Of Frankenstein; it was his idea to do it. He went over to do it together with Hammer, and he's responsible for making the Warner Brothers' deal. I think with that experience, he decided he wanted to produce some films in England. Just how he met Subotsky, I don't know. By the time I met Subotsky, they were partners.

Horror Hospital is really a crazy movie. Where did you get the idea for the car with the extending blades to decapitate heads?

That was a brilliant idea. I can't take the credit for it. The writer came up with that idea, but I thought it was ingenious, and it made for a wonderful opening. It fit because you weren't supposed to take the picture seriously anyway. If it had been played straight, it would have been too nasty.

Michael Gough is quite a talent, isn't he?

I hate to keep repeating myself here, but Mr. Gough, like Karloff and Peter Cushing, was very, very pleasant and helpful. He was also very aware of the problems of working

within the limitations of a small budget. Virtually all of Horror Hospital is filmed in actual houses and buildings. None of it is shot in a studio except for a few inserts and close-ups. Michael Gough, like Cushing and especially Karloff, was one of those people that, if he accepted a role on a low-budget picture or for less money, or for a film that wasn't up to his standards, he still gave it his all. Once he agreed to do it, Michael went at it with the same professionalism and dedication as if it was a big studio production. He never played down anything he was doing. He was extremely easy to work with. He and Anthony Balch got along well together. The last time I saw him was when he was in New York on Broadway, a few years ago. I went backstage to see him. He still remembered Skip Martin and some of the incidents during the filming.

The one who drove everyone crazy was Robin Askwith. He was forever playing jokes on everybody. He was even funnier than he appeared on the screen; he was hilarious to be with. He was really the life of the party, if you know what I mean. The life, at all times. He did drive Gough slightly crazy because, with his Shakespearean background and training, he was used to doing things in a very organized way. With Robin, you simply never knew what was going to happen next. They got along well because Gough had a great sense of humor. You had to have to play that part.

What prompted you to make The Cat And The Canary with Radley Metzger? An unusual pairing, no?

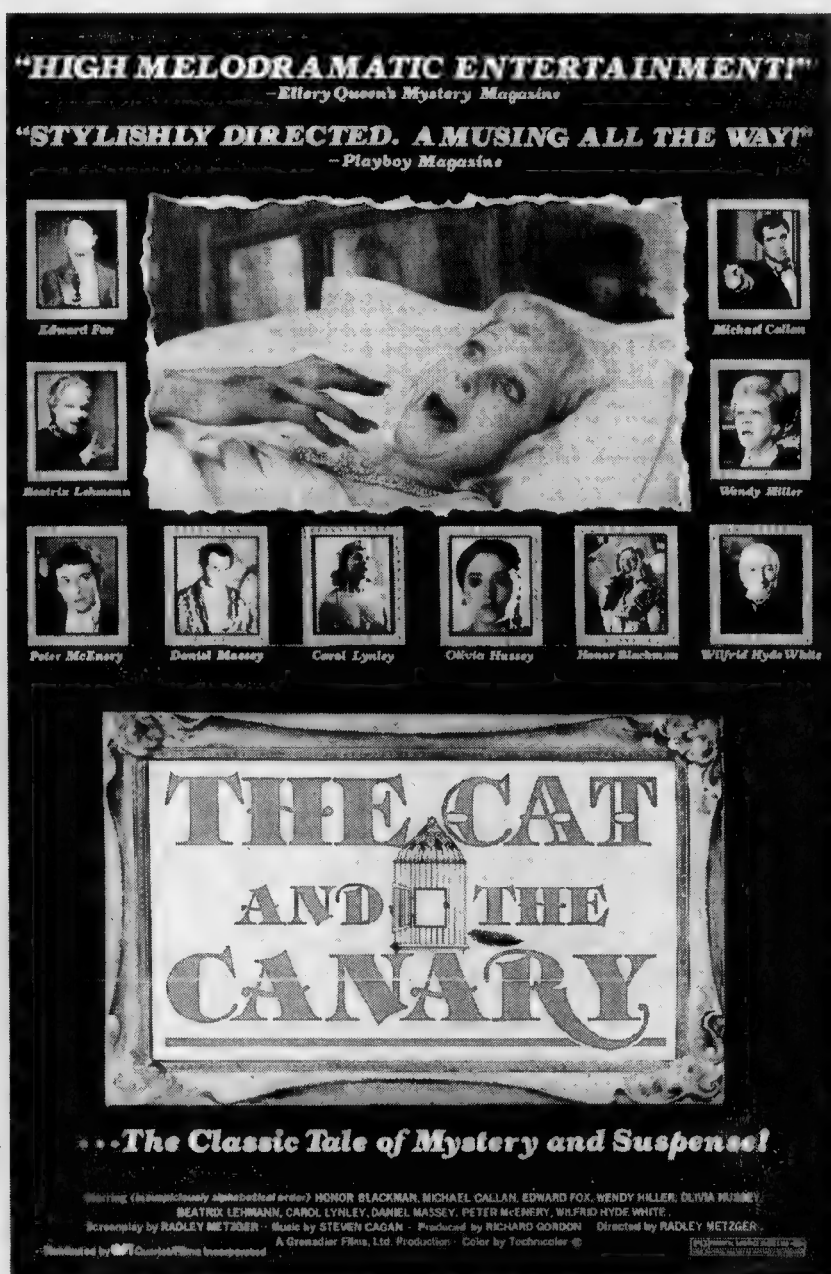
I had known Radley for many years in connection with my work handling foreign distribution for Audubon Films. Before that, Radley had been a dubbing director and I was at one point, in the 60s, bringing in German and French films for distribution in the United States. I produced the English dubbed versions here in New York, and

Radley was one of the dubbing directors. He wanted to do something outside the sex film. We were kicking around ideas one day, and he asked me what I was doing next. I said I would like to do a remake of one of the early American horror films. I had tried to get the remake rights for *Island Of Lost Souls* or *Island Of Dr. Moreau*, as it was, but I couldn't secure the rights. Then I had the idea of obtaining the rights to *The Cat And The Canary*. The remake rights were owned by Raymond Rowhowser, with whom it was possible to make a deal. I talked about it with Radley, and he said he'd be interested in doing it and directing it, and also helping to write the screenplay as he's quite a good writer. Radley also helped arrange the financing, so we formed a partnership for the film. We shot it in England. I produced it, and he directed it. We shot the whole thing in a country house; there are no studio sets whatsoever. I think we were able to get quite a nice cast together. This was the time when *Murder On The Orient Express* had come out. It was such a big success, and we were looking for a way to cash in on that by doing a sort of all-star movie, but obviously on a lower level. It did better abroad than it did here in the U.S. In Italy, which was the first place it was released, the distributors billed it as "Agatha Christie's *The Cat And The Canary*" in order to cash in. We used a catchline on the poster

something like, "In the tradition of Agatha Christie." The Italian distributors were sued by the Christie estate for using her name and making it appear that she had written it. It didn't interfere with the distribution in Italy, and from there it fanned out and went everywhere: France, Germany, etc.

Did the success of the film allow Metzger to move on to more mainstream work?

Radley eventually did some hardcore



films under another name: Henry Paris. I believe he enjoyed making *The Cat And The Canary*, but he didn't really feel that he wanted to branch out into another area. I think the main problem for him was that on all the other films he made, he was able to wear the hats of producer and director, and so remain completely in charge of his independent film. Well, you can't do that with a big picture, and as a director you have to be second to the producer. I don't think that's what Radley wanted. He wanted to make his own pictures, and control them and do everything himself. So, he went back to making his kind of movies. I would have liked to have made another picture with him as a follow-up. We were looking at doing a remake of *The Old Dark House*. That, of course, had already been remade by Columbia as a terrible spoof with Robert Morley. I was looking at that as a possible follow-up to *The Cat And The Canary*, but there wasn't any way you could go with it. First of all, the old picture was so great, you know, with Karloff, Raymond Massey, Charles Laughton, Melvyn Douglas - there was no way of improving it. Just to try and copy it and make it in color; it just seemed there was not point to doing that. We took a different approach with *Cat*, as the previous version was a comedy with Bob Hope, which was a whole different ballgame. No way we could do a serious version of *The Old Dark House*.

Your next film was *Inseminoid* (aka *Horror Planet*) directed by Norman J. Warren.

Inseminoid, as it was called originally, was submitted to me by Norman Warren. I knew him because he was making *Satan's Slave* and *Prey*, and those type of pictures; we all knew each other. Norman sent me the script which was written by Nick and Gloria Maley, who were special effects people. They really wrote it with the idea to show off their special effects capabilities. I liked it; I thought it was worth doing, and I

knew Norman. We'd always talked about doing something together. I got the Shaw Brothers from Hong Kong to come in and co-finance it because by that time, you're talking 1980, production costs had gone up considerably. It was no longer a case of being able to put together a low-budget movie so cheaply that you could do it on your own. You needed outside financing.

We heard it was heavily cut for release.

Well, it was heavily cut, but it wasn't heavily



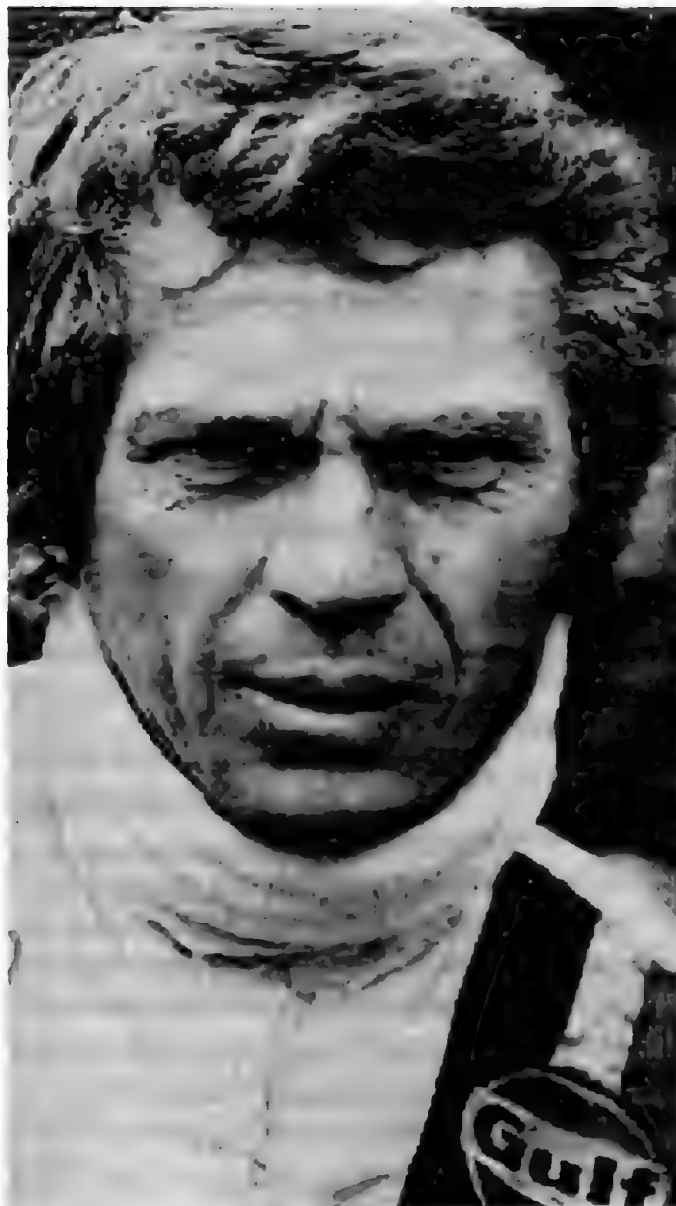
cut for violence or brutality. It was cut because the distributor who acquired it thought the picture was too long and too slow for the American market. They made minimal cuts during the picture, but they took out the whole end sequence, which was sort of an epilogue that we had shot. That in itself ran at least five minutes, maybe longer, but that's back in the video version, and I think also on the television version.

When I saw it theatrically after it was cut, it finished with Robin Clarke strangling Judy Geeson, and then had the monster baby coming towards Robin to kill him. And that was the end of the picture. We had a whole epilogue sequence where another spacecraft arrives on the planet looking for the survivors, with two or three astronauts finding all this wreckage and all these dead bodies. They conclude there is no way to determine what happened. There was no sign of life, everybody was dead, and so the astronauts are recalled to their spaceship. As they take off — and this is a corny ending, I admit — the audience discovers two monster babies have hidden themselves on the spaceship, and are presumably going to end up destroying the crew. This was also an opening for a possible sequel, if the picture had done well enough.

What happened in the 80s, and which is why I stopped producing films, was that all of a sudden production costs went through

the roof. The whole system of marketing pictures changed, so that it was no longer feasible to independently produce motion pictures. The only way to continue in production after Inseminoid would have been to get a major backer to do it. But if you get a major to back you, they take everything — lock, stock, and barrel. All you end up with, apart from your fees for making the pictures, is the back-end profit participation. And that is usually nothing more than a smoke screen. I had my own distributing business here and I wasn't about to give it up. I just decided that I would concentrate on distribution and my catalog. Now if an opportunity comes along to produce and it seems worthwhile, well then, certainly, I'd consider it. I'm not actively looking for such opportunities, however. I've had a very nice career. I don't intend to retire; I don't need to retire with my distribution business. I stay active and I am quite satisfied with what I do.





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"And that, to me, seemed like the heart and soul of what music is all about anyway: how can you get people to actually really put themselves inside of what you're doing? You have to create that mystique about it, and that was my original plan in the beginning, but it was just never allowed to happen. I mean, even on the independent basis, where you're working on your own label, if you want to get any kind of distribution, you have to make nothing but compromises with people . . ."

An Interview with Greg Sage The History of Portland Punk

by Marc Covert

Judged by the standards of a grasping, money-driven corporate culture, Greg Sage is a fuck-up, a perennial loser who doesn't have the good sense to reach out and grab whatever he can; a cantankerous, stubborn, uncooperative man who has pissed away countless opportunities to cash in on his talents. He's been laughed at on his way up, and simply ripped off when record companies have not been able to cajole him into complying with their demands on how to make his art. His unwillingness to buy into a businesslike means of marketing his work would have been his undoing if not for the fact that Greg Sage simply does not give up in the face of greedy hucksterism. He learned early on to just say "no."

Judged by the standards of music lovers who are willing to put in a little effort, however, Sage is a legendary figure, an enigmatic artist who defies categorization. When the Wipers first began storming through Portland, Oregon nightclubs like the Long Goodbye, the Earth Tavern, and the Euphoria in 1976, nobody quite knew what to think of them, much less what to



call them. Sage himself was always unwilling to play into labeling himself. Within a year, the first rumblings of Portland's punk scene began, and after the 1977 appearance of the Ramones at the Paramount Theater, it broke wide open.

The Wipers were soon considered punks. By the time they released their first LP, 1979's *Is This Real?*, the Wipers had no equal in the intensity or vitality of their live performances, and Sage was already demonstrating his incredible talent for creating and capturing his signature sound on vinyl. Now considered a punk classic, *Is This Real?* was not exactly greeted with unbridled enthusiasm by the punk rock scene or any other; it was, and remains, a fiercely original work of art. Often lauded for its songs of alienation, loneliness, or rejection, *Is This Real?* is a sonic assault of epiphanies — stark realizations of crossroads, seeing life all too clearly and screaming in anguish when you can't block it out. There is a world of difference between Sage's *Potential Suicide* and lazy hack work like Ozzy's *Suicide Solution*.

Sage should not be judged solely by his music or his onstage persona. When you meet him in person or get him talking about his art, Sage is a personable, engaging man full of dark humor, especially when recounting his treatment at the hands of the music industry and the scene he so despises. He will regale you with stories of the many times he has seen his music and his money flying into the ether on little cartoon wings, the record company employees who laughed in his face and hung up on him, or his refusal of Kurt Cobain's entreaty to tour as an opening act for Nirvana. Cobain could have learned a lot from Sage; perhaps his tragic end was inevitable, but Sage has harsh words for the way Cobain was treated by the rock world. Sage's refusal to play a part on any terms other than his own probably made the difference between Cobain dying at the end of a shotgun held in his own hands, and Sage quietly plugging away at Zeno studios, a long way from rich, probably a lot closer to poor, but alive and doing what he loves. Sage squirms at the thought of being considered a living legend, won't be nailed down on plans for live performances, and sees little in the way of creative output from the youth of today, most of them much too young to have seen him in his touring days.

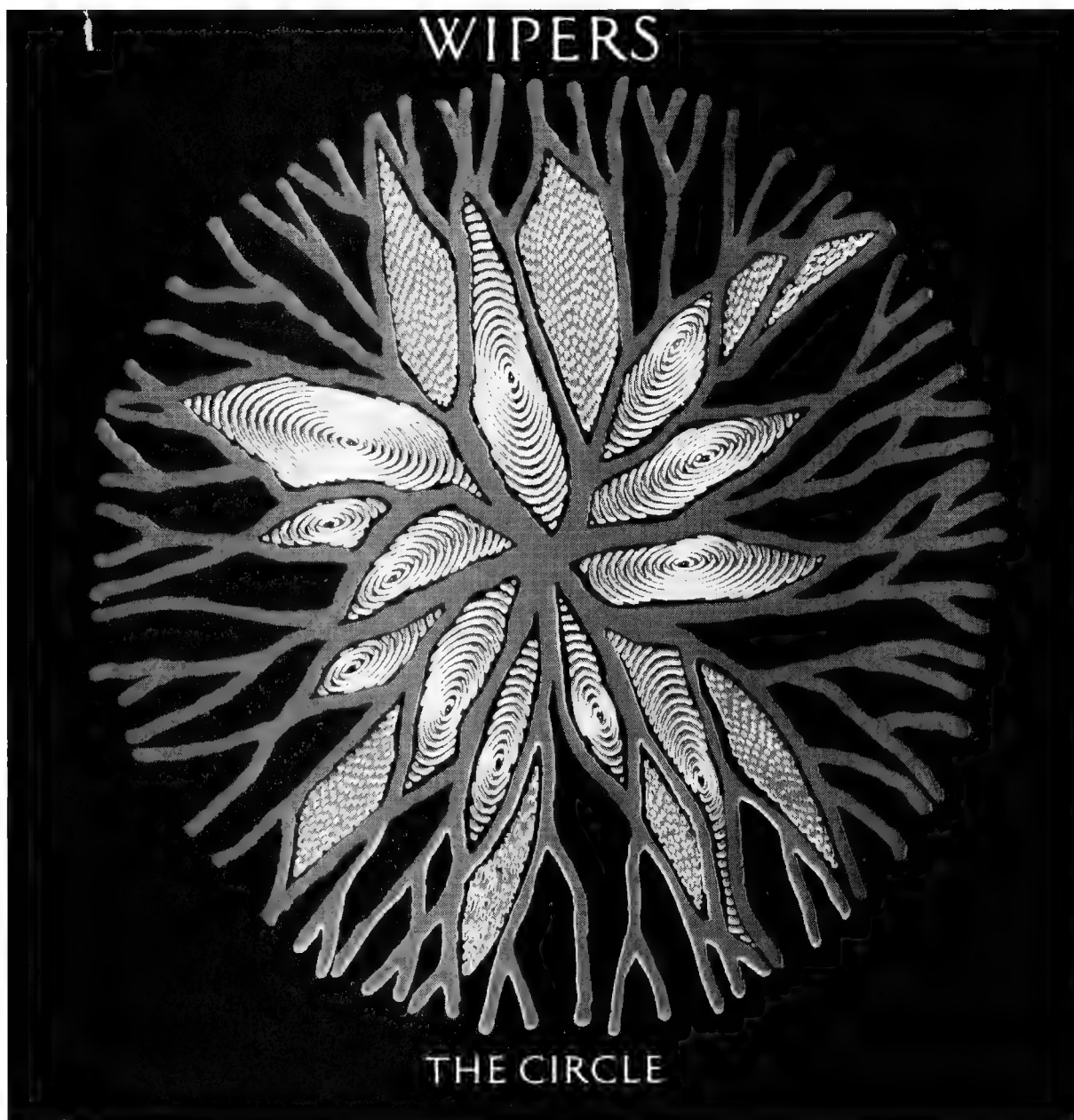
Greg Sage lives today in Phoenix, Arizona, where he spends his time ensconced at his studio, Zeno Records (www.zenorecords.com), and where he produces bands, remasters tapes for CD format, and has released sporadic CDs of new material by the Wipers and as a solo artist. His latest effort is *The History of Portland Punk, Vol. I*, a collection of singles from his old label, Trap Records, as well as the legendary *Death to Disco* punk show from 1979. He took time in mid-April to sit down and talk about the history of punk, the Wipers, and today's creative environment, among other topics.

Brutarian: You've always been pretty steadfast in wanting to look to the future, and to concentrate on what you're doing now, so it seems *The History of Portland Punk* is a departure from what you ordinarily do. Why did you decide to start a series of *History of Portland Punk* collections?

Sage: Well, primarily, it was all stuff I'd produced for a label I had twenty years ago, **Trap Records**, that I started with the first **Wipers'** release. There's a lot of bootlegs and a lot of those records floating around, and people have asked, "Why don't you put out the real masters, if you still have them?" So I said, "Yeah, that's a good idea," and, you know, there wasn't anything out there that really had all of our seven-inch stuff all in one place. And it also seems that people are looking backward instead of forward in the late nineties and this century.

It still amazes me to see these punks, in their teens, walking down the street with the rooster haircuts, the spikes, that whole punk look; it really isn't anything new.

There isn't any pioneering any more. It's almost not even accepted to be pioneering; for some reason that seems to be the attitude now. I'd say 1993 to 1995 was kind of the curvature towards things slowly reversing. It's to the point where music is just definitely a rehash of the past,



and I guess, maybe people don't sense that there's a future ahead of them, so subconsciously they look backward.

You mentioned 93 or so, and that was when the whole grunge thing was starting. Would you consider that a part of that tendency to look back, to rehash what has been done before?

Well, I wouldn't think that about grunge, but from my memory, it was a period of time, the last period of time that I remember hearing

some really unique, different, innovative styles out there. People were out there pioneering new things, and then pretty much after 93-94, that was about it.

Who were some of those bands?

Towards the end of it, I would say, Codeine struck me as doing something completely new and different. There was a band called Slint, you know, thousands of bands basically copied their style. That was

the last really unique, pioneering trend, I thought, that I really noticed or that really stuck out to me, and then after that, there was not a lot.

What was going through your mind when you dusted off some of these old tapes, these old masters you had?

Oh, just a lot of memories, from a different period of time, where young kids were doing something, you know, expressing themselves. It definitely brought back a lot of different points of view as far as people's outlooks, twenty or seventeen or whatever years ago.

I went to a lot of those shows, and maybe it was

naïve of me, but I just assumed that every city had a punk scene, and that really wasn't the case.



Well, I think a lot did; Portland was always strictly overlooked, I mean, even when we were putting out records back then, we had

to move to New York to actually distribute the stuff that was already done. The history of a lot of those bands out of Portland is, all the main distributors were in New York, and they'd tell you, "Yeah, I've heard of this band, I've heard of that band, where's your label out of?" And I'd say, "Portland, Oregon," and they'd laugh and hang up. So we actually went to New York and distributed out of there for about a year, a little over a year, and they thought we were a New York label, so it went fine.

You know, I think it was about 83 or so, 82 maybe, where you could be a band from Athens, Georgia and be accepted. The whole attitude changed. In the beginning, it was, you know, if you weren't L.A., New York, London, you were not really considered punk; it was locale, it was locale and costume in the beginning. I think that really affected the trend. And then after a few years, it kind of shed that wall around it, and it became more concentrated on music.

So, punk Portland was always considered a logger's town, the most uncool place. I mean, we had people who did interviews just beg us to say we were from some other city, other than Portland, "Yeah, no one's gonna pay attention to you otherwise..."

Was a lot of that attitude industry-driven?

No. It was just an attitude in the beginning. Usually when something new starts off, it is quite elitist, to the point of being prejudiced. But, within a year or two, that's when it changed.

There were some reunion shows here recently, with Lo-Tek, and the Styphnoids, and Sado Nation. I was wondering if you'd heard about that, and had any thoughts on getting the bands back together again?

Oh yeah, a lot of them thought it was funny, because no one paid attention to them

fifteen years ago, and now, all of a sudden, crowds are coming to see them.

Kind of like your own experience. You've said in interviews before that it takes about six years for people to appreciate your records, and by then they hate your new one.

That's because they just want something that sounds exactly like the last one, and reminds them of the last one. But I think it's healthy to go in different directions.

This latest CD is called *The History of Portland Punk*. You've always resisted the idea of being considered strictly a punk artist. I was wondering if you've just learned to accept that over the years and just let your music speak for itself?

Well, now that punk is twenty years old, we definitely weren't under the pretense of being punk, we didn't wear black leather coats with chains and "The Clash" spray painted on the back during that time. That's what being punk was at the beginning. It was definitely a statement, at least in my opinion. It evolved to a more musical pretense by 1982-83. I just never liked being labeled anything. But now, twenty years later, punk was more of a period of time than an actual sound. I mean, how do you classify jazz, how do you classify classical? It goes into so many thousands and thousands of different categories.

Sure, then you hear about "post-punk" . . .

But punk, to me, was a period of time, and that's what that *History Of, Volume I* is. It was a specific period of time which, looking back now, was how it would be labeled. It was definitely punk.

You left Portland at least ten years ago; you said that the scene was changing. Did you just get fed up at that point?

Not fed up. It was definitely changing,

though, from being very co-opted to being very self-minded, in a sense, where many bands were competing with others for who had the largest draw, which seemed kind of pointless to me. Heroin was basically flushing down too many of my friends, and it wasn't inspiring to me. I was always really fond of the desert, myself; it was one hundred eighty degrees different from the northwest, so I just sort of ended up here.

You mention the heroin problem. What do you suppose is the draw of heroin? The problem hasn't gone away around here, believe me.

I don't know . . . I know, from what I always felt, Portland always seemed like a very powerful vortex, a really powerful, creative vortex. Oh, I don't know, I couldn't even judge at the time, but definitely in the 80s, it wasn't just music, it was the attitude. It was the actual power force that was there, that made you, whether you were a musician or an artist, very creative. It was a very creative and unique place at the time, and then one day, it just changed. It wasn't anything that I could put my finger on, but one day it just — I could sense that the vortex had just shifted. Immediately after that, it seemed, to me at least, that it had a major effect on a lot of people. The creativity level changed, and I just took off from there, and I ended up here, from out of the blue, because it felt powerful here like it used to in Portland. I go back there from time to time, and it definitely isn't how I remember it feeling. Vortexes or power points are never strictly territorial; I think they shift, and I probably went with it.

I've lived in Portland my whole life, and it's hard to put a finger on it, what's happening now. Downtown twenty years ago used to be deserted at night, except for maybe the few clubs that these bands played in, and now you can't even park at night, and it's very trendy . . .

That's how it is anywhere, I mean, even

Phoenix has quadrupled in growth since I've been here. I don't know where all the people come from, outer space or somewhere, but I think it's like that everywhere.

All these places have bands playing, and not necessarily that good, but it seems that if every single place has live music, it could go either way — it could cheapen the currency, or it could lead to some creative things happening again, maybe getting that power back?

Well, I think too, it's just the lack of youth involvement. The way I always remember it, looking through music history, is that being fourteen through eighteen, there's normally this power curve, that you want to rebel against something. At those ages, you open your eyes up to the world, and you realize it's not the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus like you've been told. It gives you a sense of pushing away from your adolescent beliefs, I think, and music — it always seemed like that was the outlet for people of that age group, whether it was the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s — and the thing I've noticed a lot is that you don't see that any more, that sense of rebellion in youth. That almost seems unnatural to me, and I think that trickles down to music and art, too, since that's the age and that's the aggression that usually draws them to music or art, which is a really powerful force at that period in time. And that seems to be what I've noticed is over the last seven or eight years, is the decline of youth involvement.

Well, I'm naturally prejudiced toward what I like, but it seems the music today just doesn't have the same power, the punch, the color that —

It doesn't have the same truth or honesty, either. Communication has changed drastically; people don't communicate with each other the way they used to. Now, it's not uncommon to see people sitting at a table talking to each other through their cell phones, three feet away from



each other; that really strikes me as odd. It's just like people used to be able to communicate through instruments, and now they communicate almost the same way through a cell phone. It's some type of shield, I guess, like the Internet, where you have some type of shield to communicate to somebody else.

I think those items are easier to learn and to craft than musical instruments. When you go into a music store, you look at musical instruments, and what's made these days is basically garbage, and I wonder how a kid would get a stick of wood like that, or a box with a — well, I guess there are speakers in it — and get anything musical out of

it. It's almost like the whole system has gone non-musical, you know, not just from the individual aspect, but from the whole mechanical aspect of it. The heart and soul of it is in orbit somewhere else, and for some reason, I don't see that orbit coming back to earth any time soon; it'll evolve to something else.

Do you think digitalization had anything to do with that?

No, I don't think there's anything to really point the finger at; I think it's a combination of many things, just like how evolution changes things. It might be, possibly, an evolutionary change. I also think, well, it's

a crazy theory of mine, but that everybody is subconsciously clairvoyant, and that maybe since your subconscious has no communication with your conscious, that maybe people foresee the future being so different that they remove themselves from it, consciously, but without being aware of it. I think that would make a little more sense than pointing the finger at any one particular thing, whether it be computers, or video games, or cell phones.

You've mentioned Kurt Cobain in some of your past interviews, and he produced the 14 Songs for Greg Sage and the Wipers CD. Things didn't end up too pleasantly for him, either. It seems that the big industry push in the 90s had Nirvana as the next big thing, which was apparently just too much for him to handle. You knew him personally, didn't you?

Yeah.

Do you think that was a big part of it, that the industry tried to make a big money machine out of his band?

Well, I can't really speculate other than what he said to me, which was, he wasn't at all happy about it, success to him seemed like, I think, a brick wall. There was nowhere else to go but down. It was too artificial for him, and he wasn't an artificial person at all. He was actually, two weeks after he died, he was supposed to come here and he wanted to record a bunch of Leadbelly covers. It was kind of in secret, because, I mean, people would definitely not allow him to do that. You also have to wonder — he was a billion-dollar industry at the time — that if the industry had any idea at all of him wishing or wanting to get out, they wouldn't have allowed that. Because if he was just to get out of the scene, he'd be totally forgotten, but if he was to die, he'd be immortalized.

That's quite a statement.

Don't get me wrong on that subject. I'm not trying to state that I thought that he was murdered due to his wish to get out of the Nevermind hit record mindset. It was just an odd set of circumstances up to that point. So, I always kind of wonder about that end of the business, because when you're a billion-dollar industry, you're not a free artist at all, you're just under a state of Mafia control. I mean, I even had my life threatened, basically twice, from that end of that establishment, because of some people wanting to put out movies with some songs that I wrote. I was basically told, for my own good, to say, "No," and I would say to them, "Well, so okay, I wrote a song, and if someone wanted to pay me a million dollars to use it, I should say, 'No'?" And they said, "Correct." And they'd just say, "It's in your best interests." So, I can't say my life was threatened, but the tone of it was very, very uh . . .

. . . Ominous?

. . . very, very ominous! And then when I'd say, "Well, are you guys planning on paying us royalties for the stuff of mine that they've covered, that you've released?" and they would hang up. So, you can formulate your own opinion off that. I'm not going to say, but that end of the business is really, as you said, "ominous."

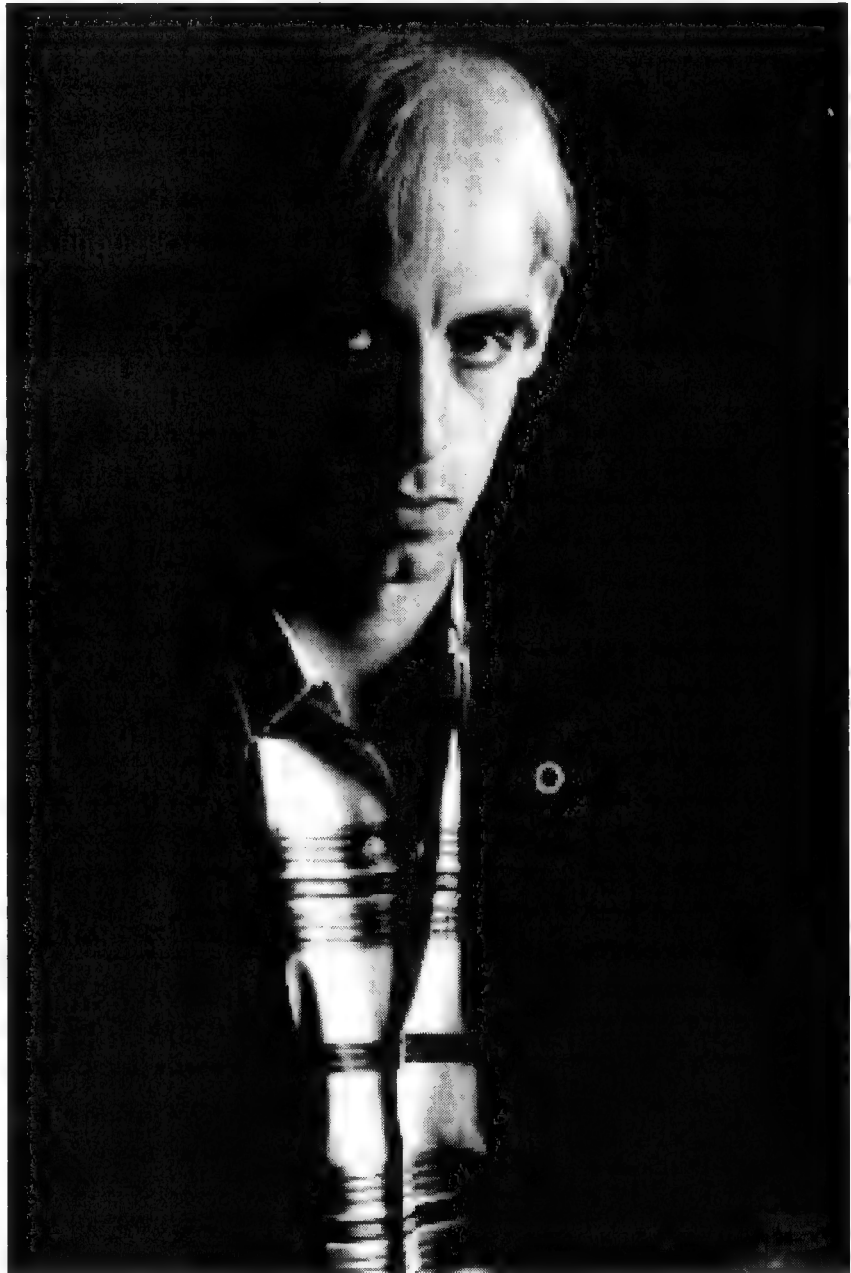
I couldn't help but notice the similarities, I mean, I guess a lot of people will never understand why you never decided to cash in; it's almost like these bands think that's the end-all and be-all of what they're doing, and here Greg Sage is saying over and over again, "Screw you, I'm not interested." Maybe things could have been different for Cobain if he had just said, "No," but it doesn't sound like he ever got that chance.

Well, yeah, I mean, if I . . . I just realized a long, long time ago what the business is, I mean, most people just see the glamorous end of it, and that's all they see. They

think, "I want to be a rock star." From the beginning, my whole goal was to do something completely different in music. My goal was, originally, to do fifteen albums in ten years, never do interviews, never release photographs, have absolutely no information about us at all, and never tour. And the reason behind that — it would have been something completely different — and maybe after five or six records, there would be so much curiosity of who these people are, what are they doing, since there is nothing out there about them, it would make them listen deeper into what we were doing. And that, to me, seemed like the heart and soul of what music is all about anyway. How can you get people to actually really put themselves inside of what you're doing? You have to create that mystique about it, and that was my original plan in the beginning, but it was just never allowed to happen. I mean, even on the independent basis, where you're working on your own label, if you want to get any kind of distribution, you have to make nothing but compromises with people.

Where I did draw the line was with videos; we never did a video. I think doing a video

would have put us in a completely different league; it would have been a good business decision, it would have helped pay the bills, but it would have also changed the whole



ideal of what I wanted to do. People see a video, and it creates an image in their mind of what you're trying to do, and the whole thing about music, the magic of music, is that it's a real individualist thing. When somebody listens to something,

they conjure up in their mind, in their imagination, their own image of it, whatever it might be, whether it's the color, flavor, or whatever. That's their own personal creation that they create off of somebody else's creation. Once you do a video, you plant in their mind your image, so it totally removes the participation of the actual listener. So I totally flatly stayed away from making videos, even though as a business decision, it was the worst thing I could have possibly done.

Are there any bootleg videos out there that you know of?

Videos? Well, I was talking music videos. I don't know . . . I'm sure there are, there's always been people like, sneaking cameras and such in.

Another thing that I wanted to ask you about was . . . this week Joey Ramone died, and one little bit of Wipers' lore that I remember from years ago was that you went to see them at a Catch a Rising Star show at the Paramount [here in Portland] in 1977. Did you go to that show?

Umm-hmm.

I was there, too, and I was thinking that was really a seminal event for the Portland punk scene. I can remember Paul Heim and Chuck Arjavac going to that show, dressed up punk style as a joke, and next thing I knew they were putting together bands like Hari Kari and Sado Nation, and they were taking it very seriously.

Wasn't that with Elvis Costello and AC/DC?

No, I think it was the Lewd and maybe Elvis Costello; I'm not sure, but the Ramones were headlining and it was like a dollar to get in.

Yeah, it was a dollar at the Paramount . . . it was AC/DC, I think, and Elvis Costello.

So the story has it that that was one of the

things that caused you to realize that the time was right to get out there with the Wipers and start playing.

No, I was already doing the Wipers for about a year. There was no avenue for it. One day I heard about this show on the car stereo — I'd never heard of Ramones, never heard of Elvis Costello — but when I heard, "Ramones," it just sounded like such a . . . just the name itself, it just sounded cool. But yeah, that was kind of a pinnacle, because then I thought, "Wow! We're doing stuff like that." I didn't think anybody was. I never listened to music, I mean, I never listened to other peoples' music. I just never did, because I'd be too busy writing, and I didn't want to be influenced by anyone. I was never in the loop or in any scene at all. I just remember hearing the name "Ramones," and that just sounded so unique to me

What did you think of the show?

Well, the Ramones, that was the first time I'd heard something different, and I was doing something different, so I just thought, Oh, man," you know?

I have a classic old poster somewhere, a real treasure. I took it off of a telephone pole in the late 70s or early 80s; it doesn't have a date on it. It's for a Ramones' show at the Earth Tavern, and at the bottom it says, "With special guests The Wipers." On it is a photo of you singing. Do you remember that show? Did you meet the Ramones, or get a chance to talk to Joey in particular?

I got to know the Ramones better while we were living in New York City in 1981. Joey, of course, was the coolest and most friendly. I would run into him at least once a week, and he always had something interesting to say. We never had the chance to do a show together again, but it was always talked about. Real sad about his

death. He never changed his attitude in the past twenty years.

I saw that you sold your old Gibson SG to the EMP [Experience Music Project]. Was that the same one you used for all those years?

Umm-hmm. Yeah, I finished the last Wipers' record I was going to do, and it just seemed sort of fitting to retire it. I have another one.

Do you have any plans to tour again — in Europe, at least?

Oh yeah, it's possible. I'm going to be working on something different here pretty soon.

Another Wipers' project?

No, I don't think it'll be Wipers this time. The last thing wasn't going to be, but it ended up sounding that way, so I thought, "Well, at least we can finish it up the way we started it."

Now, was *The Power of One* the one you put on the back burner at the time you recorded *Silver Sail*?

No, none of that I ever recorded . . . well, I did start to record it, but then you know, it became the flavor of the month, I think, to cover Wipers' songs, and I just got cold feet. So I wrote *Silver Sail* because it wasn't like anything people would expect. Another bad business decision.

Well, maybe bad business, but good art. Any chance of touring America again, or Portland?

Hopefully. Yeah, sure. I don't know what I'll be doing, but sure.

Any idea when that might be?

No, I'm just working on another recording, and then who knows?

Could you talk a little bit about what you're

working on now?

Not really, it's just something I've been planning on doing, a little different.



Solo Works

Straight Ahead (1985)
Sacrifice for Love (1991)
Electric Medicine (2001)

Wipers

Is This Real (1979)
Youth of America (1981)
Over the Edge (1983)
Land of the Lost (1986)
Follow Blind (1987)
The Circle (1988)
Silver Sail (1993)
The Herd (1996)
Power in One (1999)

Wiggy Soundz



VARIOUS - LET'S GO (RHINO/STARBUCKS)

Starbucks, corporate behemoth and nationwide destroyer of Mom and Pop coffeeshops, occasionally does something good. Like put out musical comps such as this one. Subtitled That Rockabilly Rhythm, it's a not half-bad introduction to the genre. That's thanks to Rhino Records who were the ones who actually slapped together the thang. As musical archivists par excellence - their motto: We shop so you don't have to - one would expect to find a number of rare gems here. And you do, but as the suits at Tenbucks were footing the bill, Rhino obviously had to make some concessions.



Still, the concessions involve only the utilization of big names, not the obvious song choices for said big names. So with Carl Perkins we get "Gone, Gone, Gone" not "Blue Suede Shoes." Little Richard is represented not by "Good Golly Miss Molly" but by "Rip It Up." Wanda Jackson graces us not with "Fujiyama Mama" but "I Gotta Know." The Stray Cats refused to participate, but the rockabilly revival is ably represented by The Blasters and "Marie Marie" and

Dave Edmunds "Girls Talk." For those in the know, people like you and me who own every Cramps record, you get Sonny Burgess doing "Ain't Got A Thing," Roy Campi's "Rockabilly Music," and Eddie Cochran suffering a "Nervous Breakdown." (Dom Salemi)

TONY CLIFTON - LIVE AT ATLANTIC CITY HILTON, 10/23/10

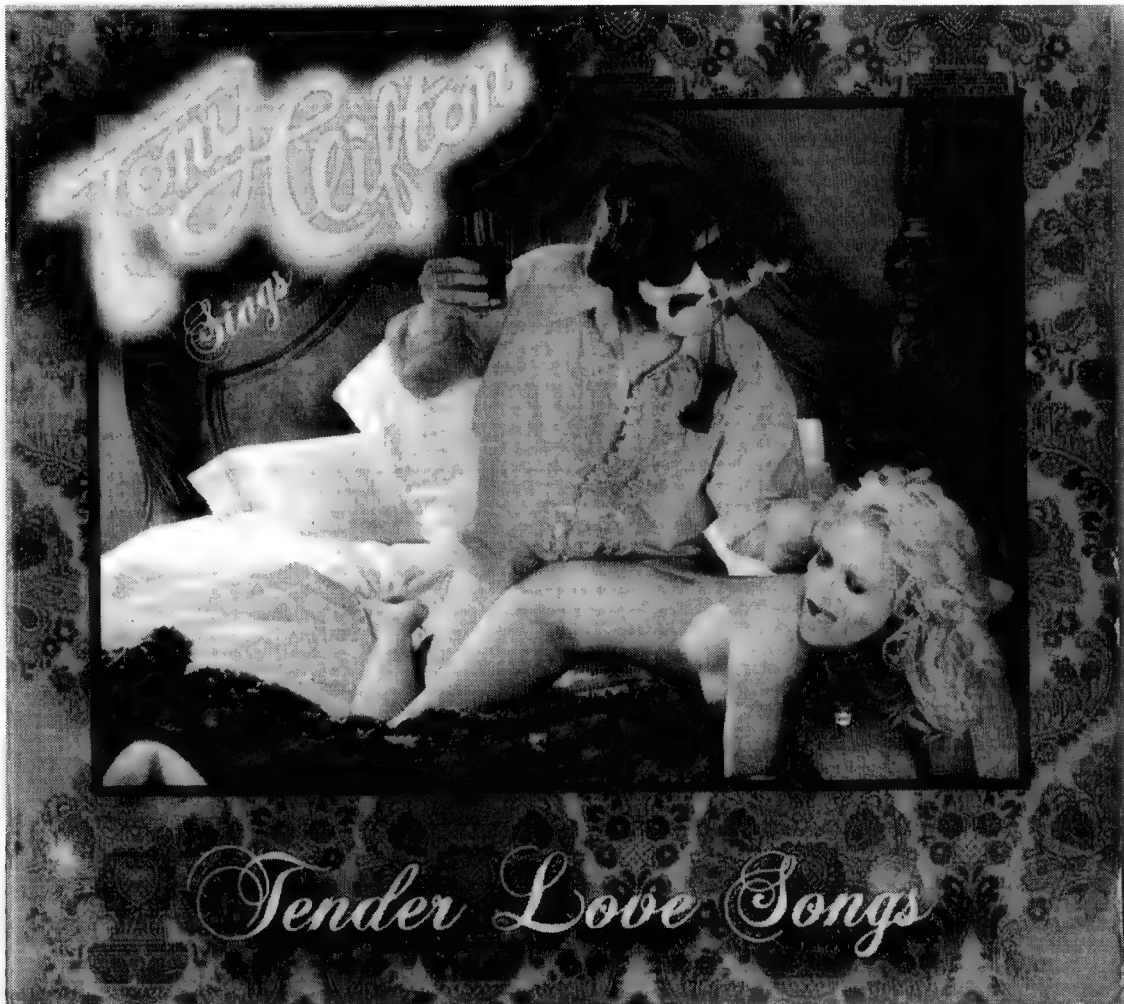
TONY CLIFTON - TONY CLIFTON SINGS TENDER LOVE SONGS (COMIC RELIEF)

Per Wikipeda, Tony Clifton is "a fictitious character created and often played by stand-up comedian Andy Kaufman in the late 1970s." Fictitious, my ass!!! If he's fictitious, then who the hell did I just see the other night in Atlantic City, playing to, at first, a packed house at the Grand Theater in the Hilton Casino/Resort? (Admittedly, 80% or more left within the first forty-five minutes of the two-hour-long show, but that's their loss! That'll teach the blue-hairs to show up at a show promising "adult entertainment," and priced at only twenty-five dollars!)

The unlovable, braying, seemingly tone-deaf, international singing sensation Tony C. is, indeed, alive and well, knocking us dead with his off-key renditions of hits by the Rat Pack, Chicago, Blood, Sweat & Tears, and other artists, as well as his incredibly racist and filthy jokes (EXAMPLES: What's the difference between a pizza and a Black man? A pizza can feed a family of four! What sound does a baby make when you put it in a microwave? I don't know either, I was too busy jerking off when I did it!), and his bevy of gorgeous show girls (NOT "strippers," per Tony.) This is old-school, Las Vegas-style entertainment in the truest sense, goddammit! Admittedly, Kaufman (or Andy and his cohort in crime, Bob

Zmuda) came up with the character over three decades ago, and several people, including that duo, have played Tony C. According to Andy's girlfriend at the time of his death, Lynne Margulies (in an interview with Brutarian five years ago), whoever wears the Clifton makeup and costume seems to become possessed by his spirit. I'm certain the latest incarnation, who's played a number of shows with his large Katrina-Kiss-My-Ass Orchestra over the past three to four years, is Zmuda. I can't prove it, but he did a magic/sword-swallowing bit the other night that was identical to what Bob Z. did in early 1981 on the infamous Fridays' episode that Andy K. hosted. The one where he just about gets the sword down his throat when an over-zealous party (Kaufman on Fridays, one of Tony's exotic dancers the other night)

"helps" him by pushing the sword all the way down, causing the magician to start spewing out blood, which, of course, grosses out what's left of the crowd. The apparently critically injured Tony returns within a couple of minutes, resplendent in a gold lame tux, for his version of the theme from "Goldfinger." All in all, a great night. My only complaint was that Tony didn't do his promised drawing of ticket stubs to give away a free night with a hooker at Dennis Hof's house of ill repute in Nevada, and the show only lasted two hours (he went three and a half at BB Kings several years ago). However, I did get to argue with some of the blue-hairs after the show, those still hanging around the theater after leaving earlier. ("That's the worst act I ever seen! Atlantic City'll never invite him back!")



As an added bonus, the great Mr. Clifton has finally recorded a full-length CD, *Tony Clifton Sings Tender Love Songs*, with photos of TC in bed with a hooker on the front and back covers. I picked up this gem at the merch table at the show, and it's every bit as bad as one would suspect, with Tony C. honking his way through a slew of awful easy listening classics ("My Eyes Adored You," "Baby Come Back," "Swearin' To God," "Fallin' In Love," etc.), redeemed only by a live version of "What You Won't Do For Love," complete with a drunken monologue about how Tony once killed a man over a girl, and got away with it. Actually, this one cut is worth the fifteen. If you can find it, buy it. (John Oliver)

THE FIRESIGN THEATRE'S BOX OF DANGER: THE COMPLETE NICK DANGER CASEBOOK (SHOUT FACTORY)

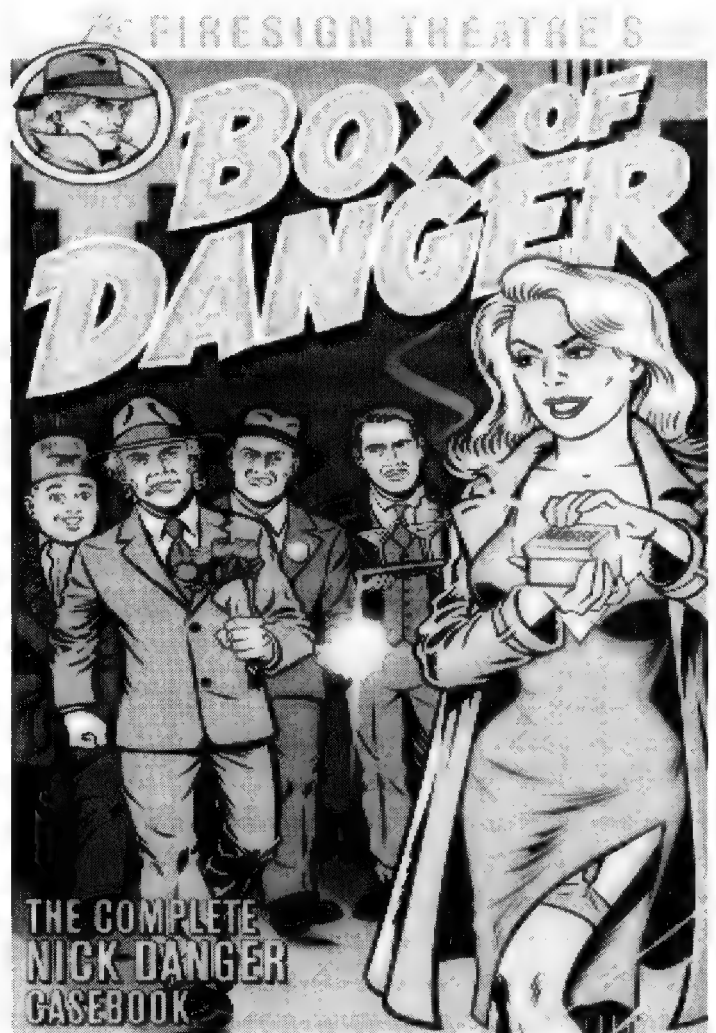
Firesign Theatre — Phil Austin, Peter Bergman, Phillip Proctor and David Ossman — reached their pop culture zenith with the 1969 Columbia album *How Can You Be in Two Places At Once When You're Not Anywhere At All*. Side One featured the title piece and displayed the ensemble's brand of absurdist humor at its cerebral, free-associative best. Yet, it was the flip-side's droll 1940's radio detective parody *The Further Adventures of Nick Danger* that made the lasting impression with comedy fans. Drenched with saucy wordplay, metaphysical allusions, and inspired voice acting, it remains one of the few recordings that works as both pop culture satire and compelling audio art.

Shout Factory's four-disc set contains every Nick Danger sketch the troupe recorded for Columbia, Rhino, Artemis and

various syndicated radio outlets. Quality-wise, all is not equal. After Firesign left Columbia, their ability to consistently imbue their artier notions with humor and an accessible plot, seemed to waver, and time has not enhanced their respective value. For instance, the "Young Guy Motor Detective" and "School for Actors" sketches are simply too abstract for enjoyment.

During the mid-Eighties, the troupe began recording without Ossman when he took a producing job with NPR. As a result, *The Case of the Missing Shoe* and *Frame Me Pretty* are missing the social consciousness of their better early works.

Although *Three Faces of Al* and *Back From The Shadows* cover some well-traveled Firesign



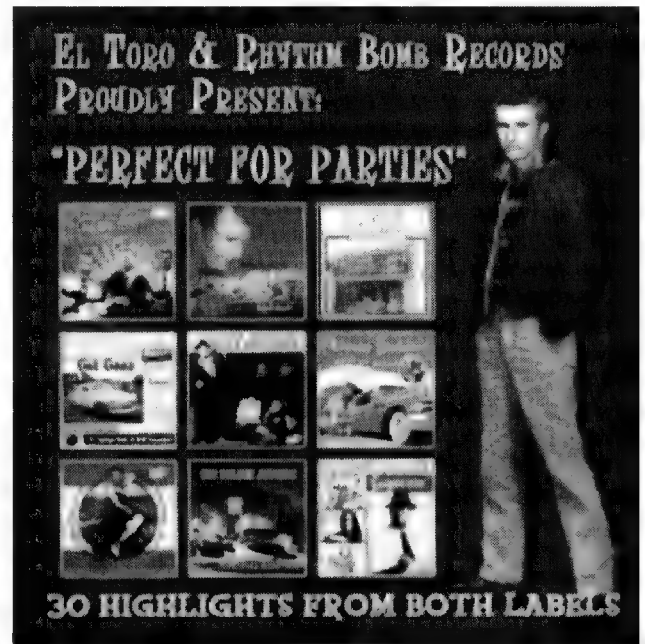
ground, they display the team's peerless chemistry, voice-play skills, and sly verve of old. The syndicated *Shack Out On the Alien Highway* series proves more adventurous, and channels the daffy abstraction of their final days on Columbia. Drawing from their pointed and highly recommended *All Things Firesign* disc, such snappy NPR-produced bits as "Lucky Liability," "A St. Nick Dangerous Christmas Eve," and "Scaled Down Danger" prove the quartet is funnier working in short blasts than longer, drawn-out sequences.

Bolstered by a booklet with fake character memoirs and genuine background info, this set is a completist's dream. That said, first-timers should seek out the original Columbia albums that began it all. (Ken Burke)

VARIOUS - PERFECT FOR PARTIES (EL TORO/RHYTHM BOMB)

This will flat out git it — almost. Thirty earnest and studiously played rockabilly thangs from combos from all four corners of the globe. While domestic students of the form go begging for record contracts, leave it to our European brothers — here a Spanish and German label — to jump into the breach. Not too surprising when you realize that the German Bear Family label is the world's largest exporter and supporter of American country and rootsy music. And while over a third of the cuts here come from stateside groups, the foreigners acquit themselves admirably. Some, like The Mad Men, from Croatia of all places, sound like they grew up in Memphis. The German Ike and the Capers with their "Come Into My Arms" channel Elvis nicely, thank you so very much. "Burning Miles" from Portugal's Tennessee Boys is as hillbilly as anything what ever came from the Smokey Mountains. The gals are ably represented on three cuts

— notably Betsy Dawn Williams, who mixes just the right amount of sass and trash on her "Outerspace Motorspace Scooter Machine" — but they all hail from the U.S. What, don't European women play rockabilly? Digressions aside, there is a downside to any diligent and reverential approach to form, to wit, such an approach almost always eschews a sense of play, a bit of self-deprecating humor. Nothing

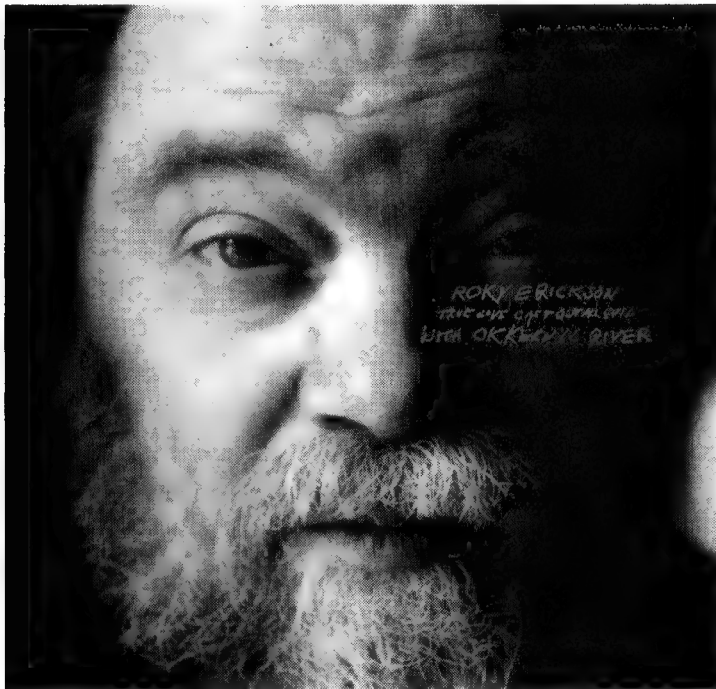


wrong with studious absorption in the classic Sun sides, still, giving a listen to the Stray Cats and the Cramps, and hearing how the interjection of wit, irony, and a bit of burlesque often results in the bringing of new wine to old ceremony, wouldn't have hurt. (Dom Salemi)

ROKY ERICKSON - TRUE LOVE CAST OUT ALL EVIL (ANTI)

First, I'd like to qualify everything else I type in this review — I was really hoping I'd love this album. If there's anyone on the planet who deserves another chance to make an inspired comeback, sell tons of records, and be able to

retire a very rich man in just a few years, it's Roky Erickson. His new backing band Okkervil River, is an excellent alt-country band, great musicians all, and in band leader Will Sheff, Roky has a sympathetic producer who's done



a fine job in sifting through tons of tapes and coming up with a dozen old songs for this new album. But . . .and here's ultimately my problem . . . I believe Roky Erickson is one of the all-time great rock 'n' rollers. Dammit, he's not a sensitive singer-songwriter of the folky/alt-country persuasion, although he does a pretty good job here in pulling it off. I've seen Roky live seven to eight times, starting in 2006, backed primarily by The Explosives, and he was a fire-breathing force of nature live, a force which appears to have been tamed for this new CD. As of mid-2008, the story was that Roky was going into the studio with The Explosives, to be produced by Billy Gibbons, and would churn out a rock 'n' roll record commensurate with his live shows.

Sorry, but this new release ain't it. I'm sure it'll make tons of critics Top 10 Lists for 2010. Hell,

it might make my list, but I can't help but feel that this could've gone in another, more rewarding direction. Per a Bucketful of Brains interview with Freddie Krc of The Explosives from late last year, when Roky went off his medications in 2008, his behavior got a bit strange, and he and his manager basically told The Explosives that they didn't care if they continued to play together or not. Freddie, Cam King, and the other band mates are busy with a number of bands, live shows, etc., and they decided that life would go on without Roky – a damn shame.

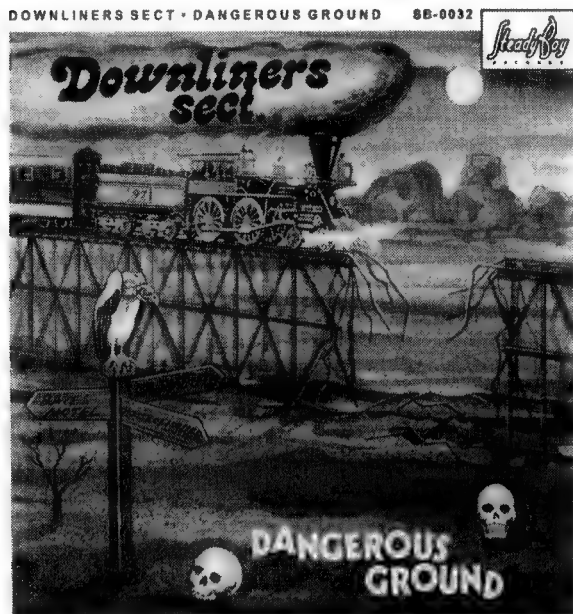
For awhile in 2008 and early 2009, Roky played with The Black Angels, a psych band from Austin, and I understand they did a great job in replicating The 13th Floor Elevators' material on stage – another recording possibility that could have been.

Okkervil River first played with Roky at SXSW in 2009, I believe. And once again, they've done a great job in backing him here. There are some really excellent songs – "Goodbye Sweet Dreams" is the centerpiece of the album. "Bring Back The Past" is the closest thing to a rocker. The title cut is damn good. I'm seeing Roky and Okkervil River live a couple of times over the next two weeks, and I'm curious to see how the old songs sound. All in all, a better comeback that anybody had any right to expect from Mr. Erickson. (John Oliver)

DOWNLINERS SECT - DANGEROUS GROUND (STEADY BOY RECORDS)

What we learned getting all growed up in the 60s was that The Rolling Stones were The Nazz: the dirtysexy, bluesy alternative to The Beatles. Then, as we grewed up a little more and learned the value of research as obsessive record collectors, we discovered – A-Ha! – that

if you wanted absolutely filthy British invasion blues-inflected rock 'n' roll, you reached for an LP's worth of early Pretty Things. Verily, though, as you aged and became a true miner of obscurities, you managed to stumble upon a group of working-class Limeys who made yon Pretty Things look like suave assayers of the Noel Coward songbook in comparison. Yea, these Downliners were the crudest, most atavistic and uncompromising of any combo

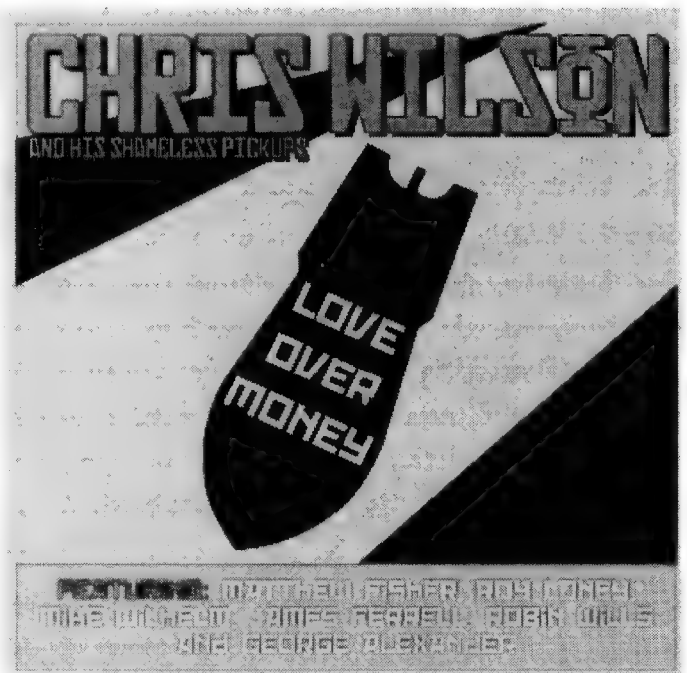


plying the Invasion trade circa 64-65. That is, this Sect not only looked unwashed and slightly dazed, they sounded like it. Which is why you had all manner of British punk bands lining up to play with them in the 70s. It's like that with louts who consistently rock amateurishly like there's no tomorrow. Or today or yesterday for that matter. But never mind that, what we got here is twelve rare tracks from the 90s confounded by founding fathers Don Craine and Keith Grant. Rough, ragged, bluesy on the faster numbers with fabulous blurring harp, wailing guitars, and hoarse, world-weary vocalizing. The slower pieces might appear a bit de trop to some, but to these ears, the cuts sound like the kind of stuff written in a bare room with a single light bulb hanging

from a frayed string in the ceiling. Nah, DS ain't the down-and-dirty crazies of yore – God, what they coulda done with the Lord Sutch-inspired “Daemon Lover” in their heyday – they've mellowed . . . into the bar band in the apotheosized watering hole of your dreamy little dream world. (Dom Salemi)

CHRIS WILSON – LOVE OVER MONEY (ROCK PARADISE RECORDS)

The comeback continues for former Flamin' Groovy/Barracuda Chris Wilson, who has just released a follow-up to his excellent Second Life which came out in 2008. For the new one, Love Over Money, he has assembled pretty much the same band, His Shameless Pickups, as on the last effort, as well as a number of guest appearances by friends and former band mates – among them, ex-Groovies Roy Loney, James Ferrell, George Alexander, and Mike Wilhelm (who was also in Loose Gravel with Wilson), ex-Barracuda Robin Wills, and Matthew Fisher of Procol Harum. The cameos are unobtrusive, and don't overshadow



Chris W. Love Over Money, both in terms of overall production and especially the songs, is a significant improvement over Second Life. Wilson appears to be trying to find his own voice this time, as opposed to channeling a 65/66 Dylan sound, which he tended to do on his last album. In an ideal musical world, some of these tunes, notably "Way Too Fast," the Moby Grape-ish "Can't Let Go," "Cold Dark Night," and "Fading Away," could be hit singles – they're that good! However, Chris W. lives in London now, the new CD came out on a French label, and Chris plays out just in Europe these days. Such is the fate of sixties-styled rock 'n' roll in this day and age. Still, a very welcome album from a name from our past, who's still making great music. (John Oliver)

JACKIE GLEASON - A TASTE OF BRASS (1967)

JACKIE GLEASON - MUSIC FOR LOVERS ONLY (1952)

JACKIE GLEASON - NIGHT WINDS (1956)

JACKIE GLEASON - LONESOME ECHO (1955)

(CAPITOL RECORDS)

In 1952, Jackie Gleason recorded his first instrumental album for Capitol Records and, in the process, established a new musical genre. That album was Music for Lovers Only, and the genre became known as mood music. Or maybe it didn't. In any case, it launched Gleason on a recording career lasting over two decades. In his liner notes for the 1996 CD release of Velvet Brass, Will Friedwald wrote, "Gleason was largely responsible for the crucial reformation of Eisenhower-era instrumental

music, launching the trend that transformed it from a dance-orientation to an easy-listening orientation."

Gleason released over twenty albums between 1953 and 1969, all on Capitol. What hand, exactly, Gleason had in the recording process is the subject of much controversy, but man-o-Manoschvitz, you don't get more laid back than these long players. Critics, and even champions of Gleason's work, claim the primary motivation for the Great One was the mere creation of make-out music. Stuff and nonsense, we say, as the orchestrations are just too damn weird to justify such arguments. If this stuff is meant to be the sound of sweet seduction, you best drop a tab or two of acid to get the vibes being laid out by these otherworldly platters.

We begin, for reasons known only to us, with A Taste of Brass which, naturally enough, finds Jackie in his brass period swinging as only he knows how, taking leitmotifs from diverse periods and transmogrifying them into hoppin' cocktail music for those who like to trip the light fantastic with highballs in their hands. Whatever, it's music for lovers pursuing "happiness and each other." We have no idea what this means, but it sounds like the living end, baby! Additionally, we are graced with hot solos abounding from the likes of jazz masters, trumpeter Roy "Little Jazz" Eldridge and saxophonist Charlie Ventura. Don't ask why genius has dropped in, Daddy-O!, just enjoy a Gleason orchestra composed of four brass sections: twin orchestras each consisting of four trumpets and four trombones, a third section made up of four French horns, and the final section consisting of four trombones, euphonium, and tuba. That's a lot of brass, but no one ever accused Jackie of lacking that particular attribute. And yes, man, yes, it's as weird, wonderful, and wiggled out as it sounds.

Music for Lovers Only was first released in 1952 as a ten-inch LP with only eight songs. In 1953, it was released as an expanded twelve inch with eight more tracks. This is THE classic Jackie Gleason album, and it is almost impossible to find in anything other than a semen-covered, wine-stained edition! And we're not even talking about the cover. The Collectors Choice's Music for Lovers Only/ Music to Make You Misty CD does not include the final eight

songs, which are "Little Girl," "I Cover the Waterfront," "Some Day," "If I Had You," "When a Woman Loves a Man," "A Stranger in Town," "A Moonlight Saving Time," and "My Love for Carmen." Music for Lovers Only was Gleason's most popular LP and it sold over 500,000 copies. The album's highlights include "My Funny Valentine," "I'm In the Mood for Love," and "I Only Have Eyes for You." Why? We don't know. Those were just the songs that got us the hottest. The album's original liner notes include some decidedly baroque descriptions of the "entrancing setting" for Jackie Gleason's music: "A wisp of cigarette smoke in the soft lamplight, the tinkle of a glass, a hushed



whisper . . ." Truly, this is Love's "entrancing setting." Especially if you are naked and haven't had sex in a fortnight or two or three.

As for Night Winds, unfortunately for you, the collector, what you're likely holding in your hands is the early, very early, 1960s reissue. Winds was the last Gleason album to enter the Top Ten when originally released in 1956. It was just like Jackie to conjure a new angle for each release, and with this outing, he employed twenty-three flutes, along with the usual grandiose orchestral accompaniment, to aid in the sublimely surreal susurrations of the melodic lines. The highlights here are "If I Should Lose You," "That Certain Party," "You are too

Beautiful,” and “Good Night Sweet Nightingale,” with orchestrations almost sepulchral in tone.

The liner notes included with the CD reissue contain, as always, some interesting reading. One glaring error finds one Mr. Osborne, reviewer/historian, categorically stating that Gleason’s music “....never rose above a languid pace.” While Gleason is certainly known for his marvelous, slower-paced songs, there are hundreds of examples showing that this claim is simply unsupported by the, ahem, record. Pace, Mr. Osborne, we offer as evidence “Away We Go.” Ozzy must have missed the very last track here, “Too Much Mustard” as well as it really goes, baby.

1955’s Lonesome Echo had aesthetes asking: Did Dali design the record cover to fit the music, or did Mr. Gleason devise the orchestrations to evoke the moods suggested by Dali’s painting? In an attempt to cast some light on the subject, Salvador maintained, somewhat mysteriously, that his works’ principal effect were meant to be those of anguish, space, and solitude. “Think too,” the strangely mustachioed one added, “of the wings of the butterfly and its echo, the shell . . .” Undaunted by this surreal Castelean gibberish, the Great One proceeded to slap together an eldritch string section of mandolins, cellos, and domras (kind of a bass mandolin), and seasoned said section with guitars and marimbas. O’ertop his eerie, melancholy orchestrations, Gleason placed the oboe d’amour, a wondrous and surpassing strange woodwind . . . and brought into being an album, and there is no other way to say it, of music for those going willingly and gently into that good night, lips puckered and seeking the cold carrion comfort of the grave’s marmoreal kiss. Put this creepy platter on, boys and girls, and prepare to enter Death’s dream kingdom. (Dom Salemi)

THE SHIRKS – THREE SINGLES AND A CASSETTE (ASSORTED LABELS, INCLUDING BIG NECK, DISCHORD, AND WINDIAN)

You won’t be able to find a lot of online info about the finest punk/rock & roll band currently residing in Washington, DC, The Shirks . . . maybe some youtube videos and a review or two about their three singles they’ve released to date, along with a homemade cassette that was (and still may be) available at their infrequent live shows around the DC area. Their sets generally run about twenty minutes in length, during which time they can get in about ten or so songs. This is old-school punk, played very loud and very well. The band is fronted by my old friend Alec Budd, formerly of the Indianapolis-based Problematics, Rip-Off recording artists, and one of the all-time best Midwest punk rock bands. Aléc and his new band mates put more energy into a twenty-minute set than most bands do in sets three times longer – they’re like the Problematics on steroids!

As a friend of mine pointed out at one of their shows, every song pretty much sounds the same . . . which is not true, but if it were, so what? It’s a damn good song! Who do they sound like, aside from The Problematics? I’ve heard the names of The Saints, Devil Dogs, and Teengerate brought up – not bad comparisons and not bad company, either. My favorite among their releases – the aptly-named DC is Doomed EP. Get these singles/EPs if you can find them; this is Washington, DC, not the home of one of the healthier music scenes. Hopefully, we’ll have this great band around for awhile. (John Oliver)

BRENDA LEE - QUEEN OF ROCK 'N' ROLL (ACE)

Between 1956 and 1967, Brenda Lee scored twenty-nine Top 40 hits, which put her in the same league with the likes of Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, and the Beatles. Moreover, along with Frankie Lymon, she was the only teenaged hitmaker of the first music devoted exclusively to teens. That said, Lee's greatest successes came with Adult Contemporary/Country Cross-over ballads ("I'm Sorry," "Emotions," etc.) that eschewed her raspy rockin' style in favor of a precocious, womanly vibrato. The upshot of this commercial move? One of rock's first great female vocalists never really hit the market with a great big beat album . . . until now.



Ace's twenty-eight-song compilation highlights the best rockers from all eras of Lee's days as a commercial force. Some of the former Brenda Mae Tarpley's biggest hits ("Dum Dum," "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree," "That's All You Gotta Do," "Sweet Nothin's") are sprinkled throughout the set. However, the better rockers come from her earliest days ("Rock

the Bop," "Bigelow 6-200," "Dynamite") when she sounded like a manic southern midget struggling to grow up.

Lee cut a fair share of cover ditties ("Let The Four Winds Blow," "Kansas City") and standards ("Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home," "Jambalaya") as album fillers, but didn't really make a serious attempt to revive her rockin' chops until 1964 when she cut a session in England with Jimmy Page ("Is It True," "What'd I Say"). Sadly, very few later records ever embraced that rockin' spirit again.

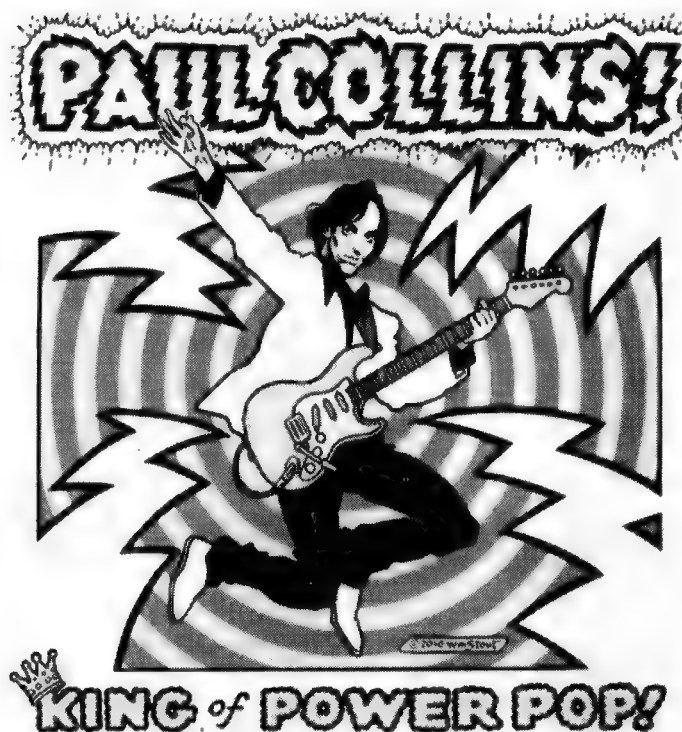
Compiled in one spot, it's easy to hear how Nashville – with its fruity saxophones, moderate tempos, and assembly-line approach – limited the youngster's potential as a rocker. Yet even with those flaws, her talents and the excellent song selections make this her finest rock album. Is she the Queen? No, but once upon a time she was a true rock 'n' roll princess, and that's good enough. (Ken Burke)

PAUL COLLINS - KING OF POWER POP (ALIVE)

DWIGHT TWILLEY - GREEN BLIMP (BIG OAK RECORDS)

Sometimes it appears we are living in strange and wonderful times. If someone had told me, even two to three years ago, that 2010 would be a banner year for 70s power-poppers Paul Collins and Dwight Twilley, I would have asked them to share their drugs with me. I remember seeing Paul Collins live at a power pop festival in Austin, Texas in late 2008. He and his current version of the Beat, a bunch of Spanish kids who spoke little English, had just released *Ribbon of Gold*, which was Paul's twelfth or thirteenth album, depending on who's counting, and what bands are involved (Nerves,

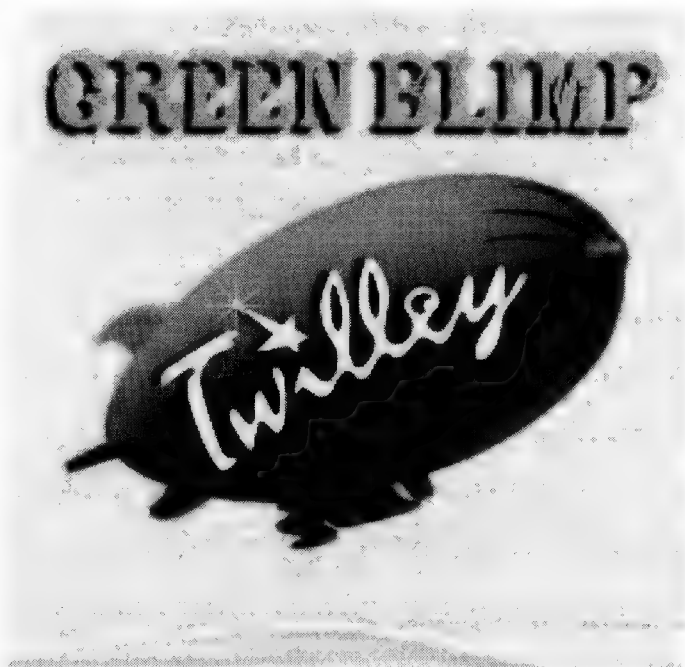
Breakaways, Beat, his country band, as a solo act). It marked a pretty strong return to his old power-pop roots from the late 70s. His past couple of records had been lower-key in nature, with quite a few acoustic tunes thrown into the mix. While Ribbon was and is a very good



album, it still didn't quite stack up to the debut of The Beat (later changed to Paul Collins' Beat to differentiate them from the English Beat), their self-titled gem from 1979 (ranked by John M. Borack as the tenth best power pop album of all time in his wonderful Shake Some Action book). Well, this new one does! . . . and I strongly suspect that Paul knows this himself, having titled it King of Power Pop. Most of these songs are as catchy as anything Collins has ever written, and based on a recent in-store appearance at Joe's Record Paradise in Silver Spring, MD, are just as good live. Yes, his voice is a bit raspier than it used to be – all the better to cover Alex Chilton's "The Letter" with. He actually sounds a lot like Chilton on this cover. Highlights include "C'mon, Let's

Go!" (evoking the spirit of the Ritchie Valens classic of the same name), "Doin' It For The Ladies" (Ramones without the raging distorted guitars), "The Hurting's On My Side" (with an organ, could be an old Dave Clark 5 classic album cut), a great two-minute-thirty-second autobiography, "Kings Of Power Pop," which could apply to a lot of those 70s rockers, and a killer cover of The Flamin' Groovies' "You Tore Me Down." Up-front and in-your-face production by former Dirtbombs bassist and much-in-demand Detroit producer Jim Diamond. One of my favorites so far for best album of 2010.

Dwight Twilley also made several classic power pop records in the 70s, notably the first two Dwight Twilley Band albums: Sincerely (released in 1976 and rated number twenty-one in Mr. Borack's book), and Twilley Don't Mind (1977). Starting with his solo debut, Twilley (1978), through a number of albums over the past thirty years on a number of labels, Dwight's music has veered more toward classic rock a la the later period Beatles, to the point that he actually released a CD of Beatles covers in 2009. In all honesty, he's got the perfect



Lennon/Alan Clarke (Hoillies) voice for this kind of music, although I personally always enjoyed his earlier recordings more, when he still shared a musical partnership with drummer/vocalist extraordinaire Phil Seymour, a solo artist in his own right in the 80s.

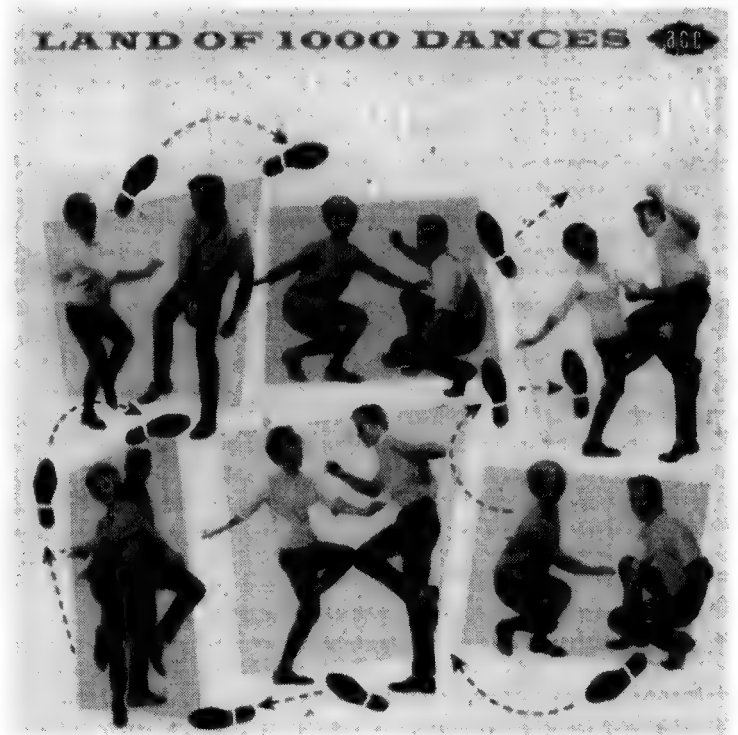
Rumor had it earlier this year that Dwight T. was in the studio with former Twilley Band lead guitarist Bill Pitcock IV, recording a batch of all-new original tunes, which were throwbacks to the days of "I'm On Fire" and "You Were So Warm," the two all-time classic singles from his debut album. He was going to release it himself, provided he could raise sufficient funds (six thousand dollars) from his MySpace/Facebook fans. I'm proud to say that I'm one of the ninety-two or so people who contributed to funding this project . . . and it was worth it! This is the catchiest, poppiest songwriting he's done in years, maybe since the late 70s. All songs check in at under four minutes, and quite a few of them sink into your skull after one to two playings, notably, "Doctor," "You Were Always There," "Stop," and "Ten Times." Now, if he could only go out on the road to promote this, like Mr. Collins has done with his new CD. Excellent! (John Oliver)

VARIOUS ARTISTS - LAND OF 1000 DANCES: ALL TWISTIN' EDITION (ACE)

The Twist was more than a dance craze that swept the nation circa 1960-1963, it was an iconic musical trend that made rock 'n' roll dancing an acceptable activity for young and old alike. Shamefully neglected by most rock historians, the artists who extolled the virtues of the Twist have – with the exception of Chubby Checker (who now sells steaks on his website) – fallen into obscurity.

Fortunately, Ace Records has put together this highly entertaining and downright danceable twenty-four-song collection. Sporting smart remastered sound and top-flight booklet notes from Rob Finis and Tony Rounce, this set kicks harder than a standard hits collection.

At the top, the inventor of the genre's national anthem, Hank Ballard ("The Twist") and the Midnighters lay down the Top-20 hit that provided the blueprint for Chubby Checker's two-time chart-topper. Labelmate Smoky Smothers further underscores Ballard's importance by remaking his most infamous r&b smash into a twist record ("Twist With Me Annie"). Better still, Joey Dee & the Starlites massive hit ("Peppermint Twist") still sounds great today, indecipherable chants and all. The



only other true chart hit is a rarely collected Motown curio provided by The Marvelettes ("Twistin' Mr. Postman"). However, fading stars a la Bill Haley & His Comets ("Spanish Twist"), Louis Prima ("Twist All Night"), the Marcells

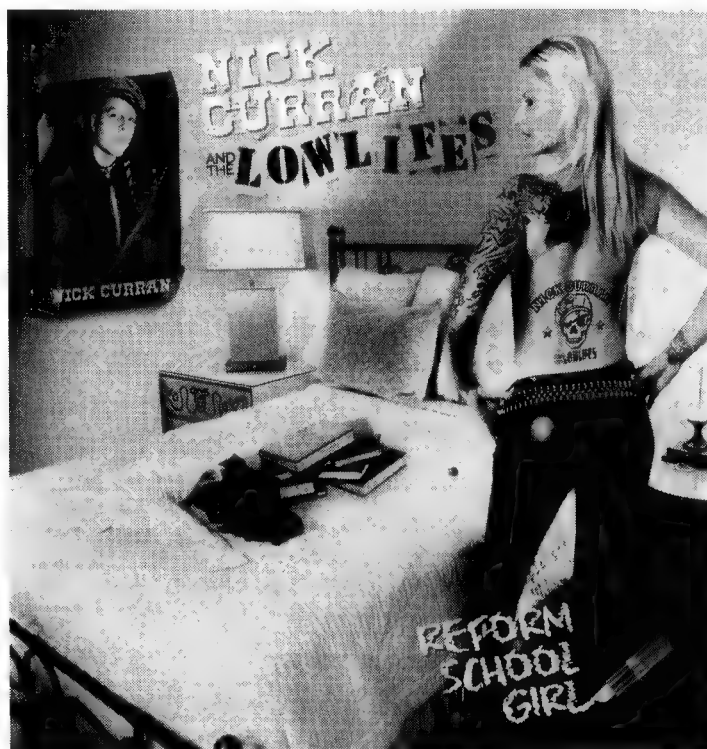
("Twistin' Fever") and Danny & The Juniors ("Twistin' USA") are heard giving their estimable all on some surprisingly fun recordings.

Imaginatively sequenced, the compilation is at it's best in the odd pop culture moments. Petula Clark – a few years away from "Downtown" – is heard redrafting Lee Dorsey's "Ya Ya" in French ("Ya Ya Twist"). Lulu Reed & Freddy King infer that John Kennedy and his White House cabinet recommend the Twist ("Do the President Twist"). Jack Hammer, who co-wrote "Great Balls of Fire," is here doing his wacky waxing of "Kissin' Twist." And novelty fans will surely dig legendary disc jockeys Clay Cole ("Twistin' Around the Clock") and Murray "The K" Kaufman ("The Lone Twister") rocking and clowning their way through two grin-filled outings. With sounds ranging from bluesy to hillbilly, and hard-boppin' to kitsch, this energetic set – perfect for inter-generational dance parties – comes highly recommended. (Ken Burke)

NICK CURRAN AND THE LOWLIFES – REFORM SCHOOL GIRL (ECLECTO GROOVE RECORDS)

Starting as a backing guitarist for rockabilly Ronnie Dawson in the late 90s, Nick Curran moved to Texas about ten years ago, where he's had a most interesting career. In between backing Kim Lenz in Dallas, moving to Austin and being mentored by Jimmie Vaughan, and joining The Fabulous Thunderbirds for a two to three year stint, he also put out four solo albums between 1999 and 2004, mostly consisting of traditional Texas blues, although he occasionally tossed in a Little Richard or Sonics-style rocker . . . just enough to surprise his listeners and throw them a curve. What his albums were known primarily for was

– they sounded old, like they had actually been recorded in the 50s. Nick used vintage guitars, amps, microphones, the works, and yes, this latest release, *Reform School Girl*, sounds very old as well. However, nothing that Nick has previously done prepared his fans for this full-blown 50s/60s rock 'n' roll tour de force that he recorded with his new band, The Lowlifes.



Curran is, for my money, one of two White singers (the other being Jim Jones from England – see review this section) who can genuinely channel the sound and fury of Little Richard, as is evident in his opener here, a cover of Etta James "Touch Lover" (which was Etta's tribute to Mr. Penniman back in the early 60s), as well as "Kill My Baby," "Psycho" (no, not the Sonics tune, but an equally frantic original), "Baby You Crazy," and the closer, "The Rocker," a cover of an old AC/DC chestnut. "Ain't No Good" could pass for an old Chuck Berry song, and "The Lowlife" is possibly the best Sonics tune that The Sonics never did. The couple of slow songs here sound like

lost 50s r&b classics, with the title tune, "Reform School Girl," evoking the Shangri-Las. All in all, a great set of rock 'n' roll/rockabilly.

And ya gotta love the makeover that Nick's undergone – from zoot-suited, watch chain-dangling, pointy-toed shoes and a conked pompadour, to tons of tattoos and a full-blown punk look. When my friend Kim and I saw him at Maxwells earlier this summer, he was wearing a black-and-white skeleton shirt that would have done The Misfits proud. (On a more serious note, we are gratified to learn that Nick C. has completely recovered from his recent bout with tongue cancer. See him live if you can. He puts on a great show!) (John Oliver)

KEPI GHOULIE - AMERICAN GOTHIC (ASIAN MAN)

Ah, the break-up album. You know what I'm talking about. A singer loses his wife or his band and puts it all on the page (or, in this case, the CD), and in a medium full of false bravado and pretentious art faggotry, finally we see some real emotion. It is kinda like watching porn when the chick who is obviously just waiting for the director to call cut actually cums despite herself. It is a moment of reality in a world that is just aping it.

The break-up album comes in many types. There is the "I can't believe you actually left me" flavor (I'm looking at you, Blood on the Tracks), and there is the "I am having a nervous breakdown so record it" flavor (put down that razor, All Shook Down). From the ridiculous to the sublime, from the great to the just plain sappy, they are always worth at least a listen because they are always real snapshots of people's pain.

Which brings us to American Gothic by Kepi Ghoulie. (See Kepi Ghoulie interview this is-

sue). Kepi has always been one of those rare performers who always wears his heart on his sleeve. From his love of monster movies to his joy at just living, Kepi has always reminded me of a younger brother you just love to see coming up the street. I mean, *just looking at the CDs* make me smile. So when his band closed shop in 2007 due to his divorce from wife/guitarist Roach, I dreaded this album. I didn't want to hear Kepi's pain. I just wanted to send him a six pack and a note saying everything would be alright, buddy.

In the end I did neither.



Cut to this Christmas. My buddy Dave bought me most of the few Groovie Ghoulies things I didn't have. He got me the last studio CD, the Haints CDs I didn't have (a country side project which is incredible), Hanging Out, and American Gothic. I have listened to a lot of break-up albums, but I don't think I ever have heard one that managed to have pockets of hope spread through the darkness. Not to say there aren't moments of balls-out pain. The centerpiece of the album, and perhaps the greatest song he has ever written, is "Stormy Weather." Sounding like a demo that they

decided to throw a few sparse bits into, "Stormy Weather" is Kepi at his most fragile. His voice is sad and a little distant. Hell, even his Joey Ramone yeah breaks your heart. Still, there is a quiet determination there. There's gonna be "Stormy Weather," whether he likes it or not. His heart is gonna break again. But he isn't gonna quit. Shoulda known he wouldn't. There are even a couple of love songs in here, though "True Love Will Find You in the End" almost sounds like Kepi is singing to reassure himself.

This is quite possibly Kepi's finest hour (or half hour, per his usual). American Gothic is a campfire sing-a-long for the broken hearted who can't stop believing things are gonna get better if they can just keep hanging on. Looks like we got a new flavor. (RR Moore)

THE JIM JONES REVUE – BURNING YOUR HOUSE DOWN (PIAS RECORDINGS – IMPORT)

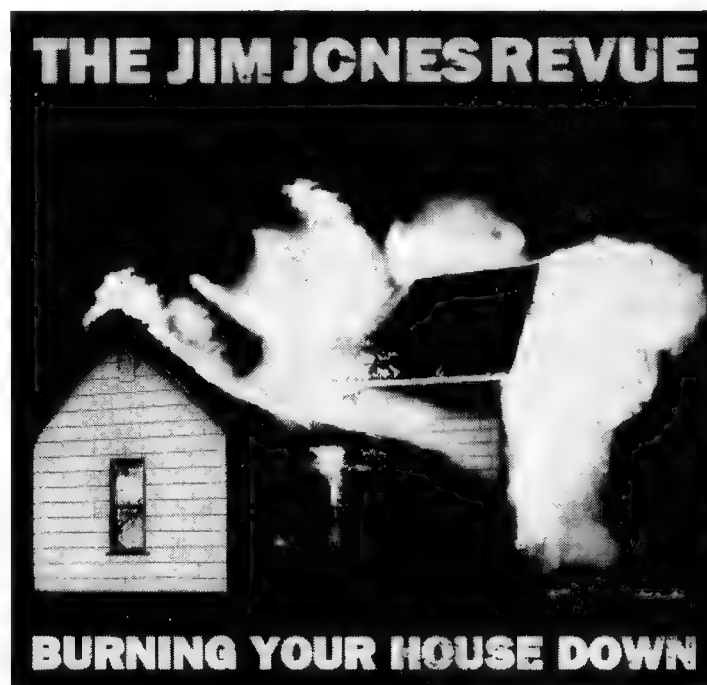
Just saw these guys in New Orleans in September at a special Ponderosa Stomp show at One Eyed Jacks, opening for Roy Loney/Cyril Jordan and The A-Bones. They were ungodly loud, but not in a Motorhead-playing-in-a-nightclub way. This was more deafening; they were very noisy, playing through amps that were constantly feeding back, with front man Jim Jones using microphones seemingly incapable of containing his raging, screaming vocals. And they were one of the best

live acts I've ever laid eyes on!

While struggling to come up with an accurate description of the Jim Jones Revue's music, I remembered a recent interview the band did with MOJO magazine, which I looked up. Jim J. (former kingpin of Thee Hypnotics and Black Moses) and the band discuss the makeup of their musical DNA in this article. They broke it down as: thirty per-cent Little Richard, twenty per cent Birthday Party, fifteen percent Sonics, fifteen percent MC5, ten percent gun Club, five percent Johnny Thunders, and five percent Huey "Piano" Smith. Whew!!! I also recall an article in The Guardian where a record reviewer stated that the Jim Jones Revue feels that rock 'n' roll didn't really need to evolve past 1956 – it just needed to get louder and more distorted. Both really good descriptions. I mentioned in the review of the new Nick Curran album that he's one of two White singers who can effectively channel Little Richard. Jim Jones is the other. If anything, these guys are even more over-the-top than Little Richard was! Every song seems to be an exercise in

Jones tunelessly screaming his lungs out, and the band playing as if their lives depend on it. A pure crossbreed between rockabilly and high energy rock 'n' roll.

This is one of the very few bands I've ever seen or heard where the record/CD



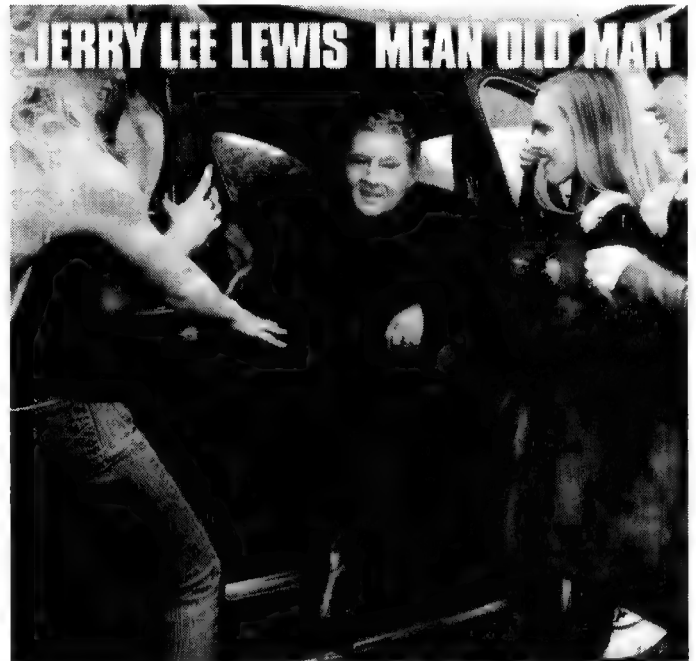
actually does a great job in capturing their live act, to the point where it sounds like the band just records live in the studio, without overdubs. For *Burning Your House Down*, the Jim Jones Revue's second studio album (not counting 2009's *Here To Save Your Soul*, which includes the eight songs on their first four singles), was produced by Jim Scavunos of Grinderman, who cleans up their sound just a bit, compared with their self-titled debut CD from 2008. He doesn't, however, clean it up to the point that you aren't aware it's the Jim Jones Revue. The songs all seem to start off in twelve-bar blues territory, then they mutate into something else. Highlights this time around: their first single from the CD *High Horse* is "High School Confidential," updated to 2010; and the title track takes the band into Tom Waits' territory for the first time. "Elemental," "Shoot First," and "Killin' Spree" sound just like you imagine they would from their titles. My current favorite band from the UK. This is vital, mandatory rock 'n' roll, and every household needs it! (John Oliver)

JERRY LEE LEWIS - MEAN OLD MAN (VERVE FORECAST)

*"What a drag it is getting old." - Rolling Stones,
"Mother's Little Helper"*

It is shockingly sad to realize that Jerry Lee Lewis' 2006 guest-star glutted release *Last Man Standing* proved to be the legendary piano-pumper's biggest selling album ever. Worse still, his current caretakers, hoping commercial lightning will strike twice, have released this new all-star album. Neither album remotely approaches the Killer's fabled greatness. The new disc is less novel than the first but, as with everything this artist has done, it boasts several indelible moments.

Produced by session-drumming legend Jim Keltner, the disc has been released in two editions: one containing ten tracks, and the



other a deluxe eighteen-song version reviewed here. Besides offering Lewis a powerful backbeat, Keltner has mixed guest stars and instrumental punch-ins more subtly than on the previous album. In the process, he has also downplayed Lewis' distinctive piano playing, omitting it entirely on several tracks, which sometimes saps the disc of its intended excitement.

Occasionally, the Louisiana native sounds every bit of his seventy-five years ("Bad Moon Rising"), or like he needs to be propped up by guest artists ("I Really Don't Want to Know"). Embarrassingly, Tim McGraw completely outshines Lewis on his own 1977 hit "Middle Aged Crazy." Fortunately, stirring compensations do exist elsewhere.

Aided by Kid Rock and Slash, Lewis turns in a smart reworking on his 1978 hit "Rockin' My Life Away." Ringo Starr and John Mayer help transform the oft-recorded "Roll Over

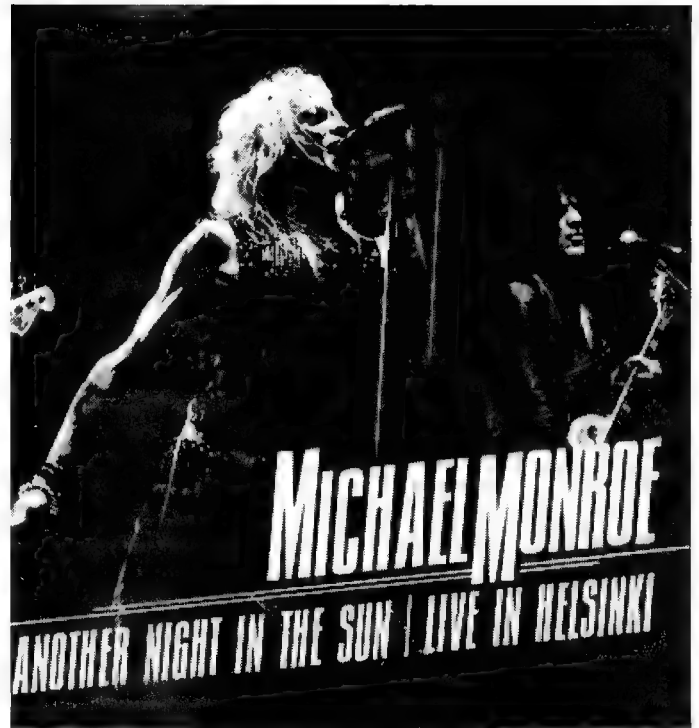
Beethoven" into a fresh jukebox rocker. Sheryl Crow brings a sweet, sunny quality to "You Are My Sunshine" and on another JLL staple; Eric Clapton transforms "You Can Have Her" into country-edged rockabilly.

Yet the very best moments occur when Lewis is challenged by material not normally found in his repertoire. Indeed, he wrings both sorrow and callous fatalism from his country rendition of the Stones "Dead Flowers" (Mick Jagger on harmonies), and with Keith Richards's help, Lewis imbues "Sweet Virginia" with an appealing sense of drunken revelry. The Kris Kristofferson-penned standard "Sunday Morning Coming Down" provides gut-wrenching, sober reflection (but one can't help but wonder what he could have done with this song forty years ago). Better still is the snapping, snarling title track, "Mean Old Man," which offers enigmatic attitude in place of explanations, and teasing irony instead of expected wisdom.

The ten-song edition is tighter and more focused, and therefore better for casual fans. Longtime fans and collectors may prefer the ups and downs of the eighteen-track version. (Neither set is as good as 1995's *Young Blood*.) In either case, one has to wonder when Lewis will be allowed to release discs without guest stars again. (Ken Burke)

MICHAEL MONROE – ANOTHER NIGHT IN THE SUN/LIVE IN HELSINKI (RCA VICTOR)

The most popular (eight to ten million records sold, although mostly in Scandinavia and Japan), and arguably the best rock 'n' roll band ever to come from Finland, Hanoi Rocks broke up for the second time in 2009 (first time was in 1985, in the wake of their drummer Razzle



being killed in an auto accident – Vince Neil driving). While they made a bunch of great records/albums, none of them, to me, were produced to the point where they captured their live sound. Singer Michael Monroe has had a fairly successful solo career when Hanoi Rocks has been out of commission, and has also fronted a couple of side project bands, Demolition 23 and Jerusalem Slim, each of which released albums. Mr. Monroe has never stayed inactive for any lengthy period of time.

Which brings us to his latest band he put together in early 2010. For this new project, he has Steve Conte (New York Dolls, Conte Bros, Company of Wolves) and Ginger (front man of The Wildhearts) on guitars and backing vocals, Sammy Yaffa (Hanoi Rocks, New York Dolls) on bass/vocals, and Karl Rosqvist (Danzig, Chelsea Smiles) on drums. Those guys, along with Monroe on vocals and sax, bring one hell of a lot of talent, and possible ego conflicts, to the table. When I saw them at the Highland Ballroom in NYC this past June, they worked like a well-oiled machine – a great band! Per

Michael M., they intend to stay together long enough to record a studio album.

In the meantime, they released a live CD of a show they played in Finland on July 6, 2010, where they covered all bases of MM's career: Hanoi Rocks tunes ("Motorvatin'," "Back To Mystery City," "Malibu Beach Nightmare"); Demolition 23 (the great opener "Nothin's Alright," "Hammersmith Palais," "Dysfunctional"); solo songs ("Not Fakin' It," "Dead, Jail or Rock & Roll"); covers ("Love Song," "Machine Gun Etiquette," "I Wanna Be Loved," "1970"); and even a new song or two ("You're Next," "Motorheaded For A Fall," although, oddly, not "Another Night In The Sun," which they played at the shows). Great shows and great live CD, even if Michael M. himself is very scary looking now (has he had plastic surgery on his face?) (John Oliver)

VARIOUS - THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN ROCK 'N' ROLL - VOLUME 2 (SPECIAL DOO WOP EDITION: 1956-1963) (ACE)

Doo Wop was the first version of rock 'n' roll to burst into the musical mainstream. It is also the first rock 'n' roll-oriented genre to experience a substantive revival (during the early 60s). This thirty-song collection of minor chart records deftly demonstrates the street corner appeal of these mostly East Coast groups, while providing some innocent good times.

Love is the main focus lyrically. Sonically, there are plenty of falsetto leads, burbling bass voices, and teen tunes galore. Groups like the Cleftones ("You Baby You"), the Butanes (Don't Forget I Love You), the Craftys ("L-O-V-E"), and the Belmonts sans Dion ("Come On Little Angel") attack their paeans to the fair sex with pep and great humor. Equally entertaining

are the Delcos ("Arabia"), who seemingly enjoy aping the Cadets, Nino & The Ebb Tides ("Juke Box Saturday Night") imitating a variety of teen pop acts, and an early version of the Temptations effortlessly channeling Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs ("Paradise").

Yet, the greatest Doo Wop groups were always tragedians at heart. The Spaniels ("Everyone's Laughing"), the Rays ("Magic Moon [Claire De Lune]"), The Blendtones ("Lovers"), the Enchanters ("I Lied To My Heart"), and The Embers ("Solitaire") mined more poignant song-appropriate histrionics in their two-minute expositions than most modern singers do in a whole career.

The juxtaposition between romantic heartbreak and frivolous teen exuberance gives this compilation a zingy AM-radio feel that is quite appealing. Moreover, Peter Grendysa's highly informative track-by-track booklet notes are rich in context, and smartly augmented with rare photos, clippings, and label photos. Cats who believe that Doo Wop is the pure rock 'n' roll should revel in this beautifully packaged set. (Ken Burke)




**Who made the
orange more tempting
than the apple?**



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Brutarian Library



**Military Mayhem: 2,500 Years Of
Soldierly Sleaze and Scandal —
Terry Crowdy (Paperback Edition
2010) Osprey Publishing Ltd.**

Transvestite knights, adulterous emperors, draft-dodging professional boxers, and every sort of corrupt, aberrant, or bizarre incident or behavior associated with military people and the practice of their trade is covered in the 320 pages of this informative and amusing volume.

MILITARY



2,500 Years of Soldierly Sleaze
and Scandal

TERRY CROWDY

Written by Terry Crowdy, veteran author of a dozen titles, *Military Mayhem* follows in the tradition of one of his previous works in

particular, *Military Misdemeanors: Corruption, Incompetence, Lust, and Downright Stupidity*, and covers the same sort of ground.

A couple of things make this book stand out from other volumes on military blunders and the like. One is the quality of the research that went into it and the veracity of the accounts, something many such books cannot claim; all the chapters are thoroughly footnoted and none of the stories in the book with which I was already familiar are spun into more than they should be. Another notable characteristic of this compilation is a result of it being written by a British author and, while it ties in with events that will be familiar to many readers of military history, it thus also includes numerous episodes less likely to be familiar to American readers (e.g., related to the Crimean War).

Military Mayhem has some six dozen chapters organized into a number of broad, thematic sections, ranging from the now-familiar Persian invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. that was stopped by 300 Spartans, right up through a 2006 incident in which a Swiss reservist went on a rampage with his service weapon. Every major war of the past 2,500 years, and many minor ones, involving Western powers are represented in its pages, including the Napoleonic Wars and the ongoing Iraq War.

Apropos of that old saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover," there is one minor but annoying shortcoming to this volume, and that is, in fact, its cover,

which seems to have been thrown together as an afterthought. Its plain white background features a cheesy, cartoonish illustration of a

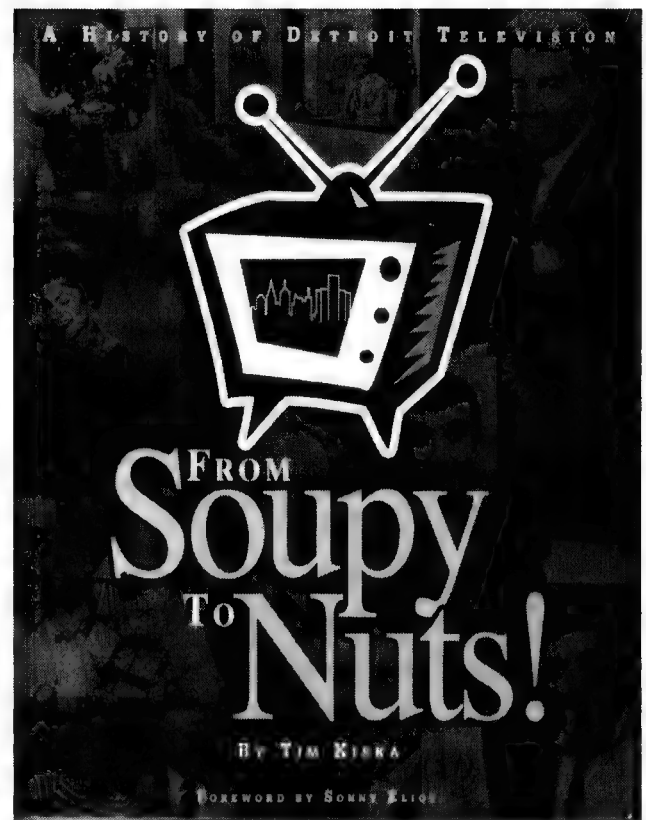
GI clutching a walkie-talkie, and is so sloppily executed that the soldier in question has six digits on its left hand! Why the publisher would degrade the quality of this book by slapping such a crappy cover on it I don't know; I suspect it has put off more than one potential reader.

If they can get past the cover and into the contents of this book, however, most readers will find it an enjoyable and titillating read that goes where most military histories won't go. (Michael Varhola)

From Soupy to Nuts: A History of Detroit Television – Tim Kiska (2005) Momentum Books

Several years ago while scouting for a new project, this writer told Brutarian's Dom Salemi, "We had better local television in Detroit then I've seen anywhere else. I should write a book about it." Salemi discouraged the idea, saying, "Don't be a poor deluded fool, somebody has probably already done that." Well, our publisher was absolutely right. Author Tim Kiska has assembled the book I have always wanted to write — a smartly compiled labor of love about local Detroit television.

The author, a former television columnist for the Detroit News, has sectioned off the entries into a pop culture encyclopedia featuring music, kid shows, local news people, afternoon movie hosts, and even such professional wrestlers as Bobo Brazil, the Sheik, and Lord Athol Layton. Our own adventurer George Pierrot, who showed home movies of his many travels, is covered in detail for the first time in my memory. More importantly, Detroit kid-show pioneer Soupy Sales provides great insight, as do entries on such live TV favorites as Captain Jolly, Johnny Ginger, Jerry Booth, Milky the Twin Pines Clown, and channel 50's underrated Sgt. Sacto.



Decades before the advent of Turner Classic Movies and host Robert Osborne, Detroit-area viewers learned about the classic Hollywood films from great TV movie hosts. From the ridiculous to the sublime, they saw The Ghoul, Sir Graves Ghastly, Rita Bell's Prize Movie, and the uncrowned king of Detroit television, Bill Kennedy. A former bit player in films, and announcer for the Superman TV series ("...fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way") during Hollywood's last gasp of glamour, Kennedy began his career as an afternoon movie host for CKLW in Windsor, Ontario. When UHF became popular during the mid-to-late 60s, Kennedy moved to WKBD in Detroit, where he showed all the classic Warner Brothers gangster and social message pictures, telling the stories behind them all during his live segments. Earlier in the morning, pretty Rita Bell showed all the classic musicals and comedies while running a trivia contest that nobody ever seemed to win.

Kiska recalls it all and throws in a great many

behind-the-scenes creators and directors that kept local TV vital. In the entire book, the only local figure that the author missed was former umpire Red Jones, who told sportscaster Al Ackerman all the colorful baseball stories that made him a popular after-dinner speaker.

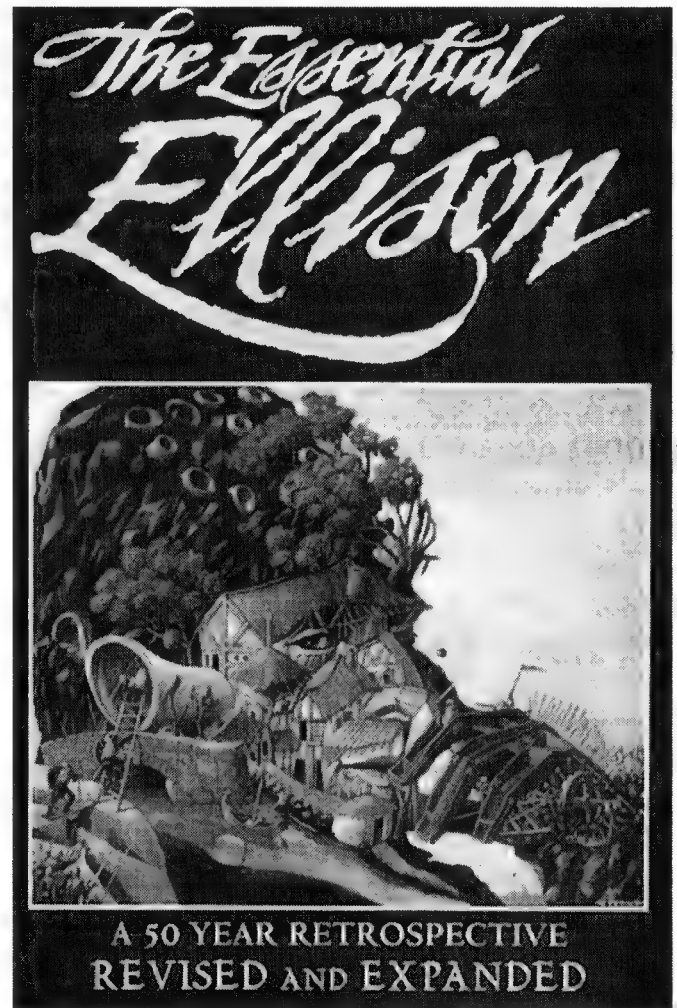
Boasting a foreword by zany channel 4 weatherman Sonny Elliot, this highly informative 221-page book had this writer pining with nostalgia and wishing someone would perfect time travel. All former Detroit area TV-addicts should seek this one out. (Ken Burke)

The Essential Ellison: A 50 Year Retrospective – Harlan Ellison, Edited by Terry Dowling with Richard Delap and Gil Lamont (2005) Morpheus

The Essential Ellison is a review-proof book if ever there was one. Literally. No matter what I say here in my allotted space of a few hundred words, readers roaming the stacks at Barnes & Noble, or Borders, or their local indy are going to buy it or not based on a wide range of factors — only a few of which have anything to do with whether or not the book is worth the cover price. On and off the page, Harlan Ellison has been a virtual force of nature in the big tent known as speculative fiction from day one, and while many readers marvel at his power and spectacle as they soak up all they can, others decided somewhere along the way they simply didn't like the weather.

It is a curious phenomenon, being unable to discuss the prose without discussing the author. But such is the unique position of Ellison — the shadow he casts is a very large one indeed. The influence he's had on modern genre, direct or indirect, is immeasurable. To that extent, the title of

this book is a straightforward case of truth-in-packaging: it is essential — essential for aspiring writers, veterans of the field, editors, fans . . . anyone with a desire for a thorough appreciation and understanding of SF.



Readers wanting a broad sampling of Ellison's career, without having to scour secondhand bookshops for tattered copies of *Angry Candy* and *Alone Against Tomorrow*, need look no further than this massive, 1200-plus page tome. All the Nebula winners are here, as are the Hugo winners, and various other award winners, too. Yes, that means you can get your fill of "Jefty is Five," "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream," and the ever-popular "Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktockman." Even comparatively recent "The Man Who Rowed Christopher Columbus to Shore" is

here, named one of the Best American Short Stories for 1993. The cover text isn't joking when it declares this edition to be "A 50 Year Retrospective," as it is significantly expanded from the original 1987 version, which was merely "A 35 Year Retrospective."

Already familiar with a good number of the works included in this book, I quickly found that my reactions to them haven't changed all that much over the years. I still find "Paladin of the Lost Hour" powerfully moving and poignant. "Adrift Just Off the Islets of Langerhans," on the other hand, stubbornly remains as impenetrable and baffling as ever.

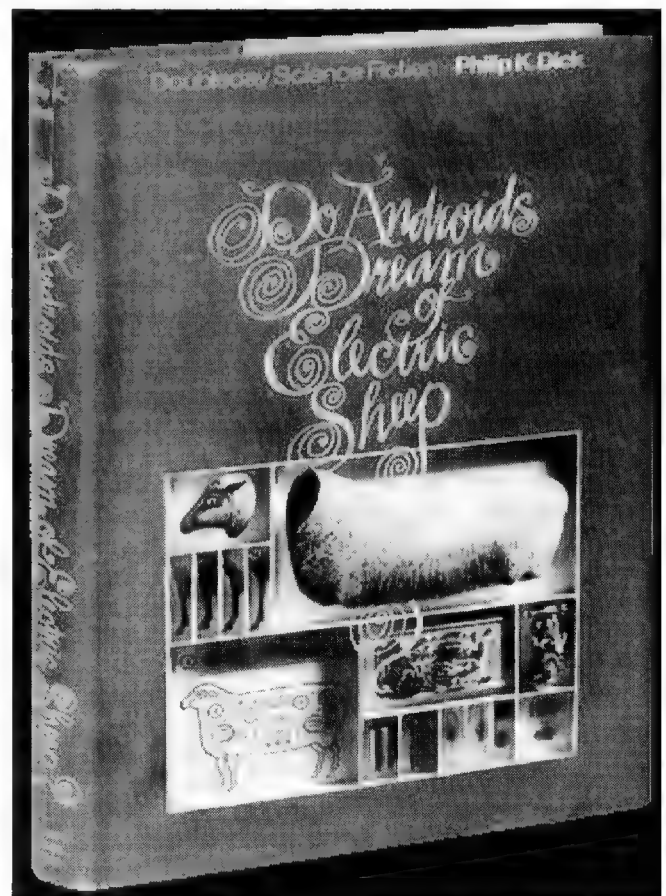
But those stories aren't what I find so engrossing, so captivating about The Essential Ellison. No, it's all these other pieces shoehorned in between the covers that I've never seen previously that make me truly appreciate Ellison's depth and range as a writer. Stories such as "The Resurgence of Miss Ankle-Strap Wedgie," a callous and tragic story that has the audacity to go with an against-the-grain ending that is as unexpected as it is correct. Or "The Tombs," an excerpt from Memos from Purgatory, one of Ellison's true-life-adventures that is darkly amusing until you remember it's not a brilliant Gilliamesque dystopian riff on Homeland Security and the Patriot Act, but rather New York City circa 1961. Sure, the story is embellished in ways I'm certain I don't have clue one about. Doesn't matter. It gets the point across. Ellison is one of the most instinctive storytellers alive. He excels at sniffing out the heart — the living, breathing narrative — in both his life experiences and the intangible seeds of ideas that flourish within his fertile mind.

For all his famous protests to the contrary, Ellison is inarguably a science fiction writer. But he is also a fantasist — having written significantly more of that genre than its SFnal cousin — not to mention a journalist, an essayist, a screenwriter, and mainstream author. The Essential Ellison makes it very,

very clear that in a society obsessed with labels and pigeonholes, Ellison has never fit comfortably in any category. Instead, he's tackled them all (or so it seems), and more often than not has come out on top. Considering the often insular tastes of genre readers, that alone is reason enough to place this book at the top of every recommended reading list. Or not, as the case may be. I've said my piece, and now leave you, the reader, to do as you will. (Jayme Blaschke)

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? — Philip K. Dick (1968) Norstrilla Press

Never, perhaps, has such an OK book been so reviled as has Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? — Philip K. Dick's dystopian tale of what it means to be human in a post-apocalyptic world. It is not a great book,



certainly, and not even an especially good one, but it is by no means terrible or, one would think, likely to inspire any extreme emotions.

My first encounter with the rage aroused by this mediocre novella occurred about twenty five years ago, when my friend Paul K. took the book with him on a bus trip. So angry did it make him that, upon finding himself in a roadside latrine without toilet paper, he proceeded not just to wipe his ass with pages from the book — but to do so from the back of the paperback, starting with pages that he had not yet read!

In the years since then, I have met many other people who have been irritated by this slim volume — admittedly not quite to the extent as my friend — but never ended up reading it myself until recently. And then the reasons for its unpopularity became clear to me.

Originally published in 1968, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* feels more typical of the science fiction of a decade earlier and would certainly have faded into obscurity, never republished and only rarely read, were it not for one critical fact: It was, to some extent, used as the basis for the 1982 film *Blade Runner*. And this is the starting point for many people's dissatisfaction with it.

Whatever its detractors — including an awful

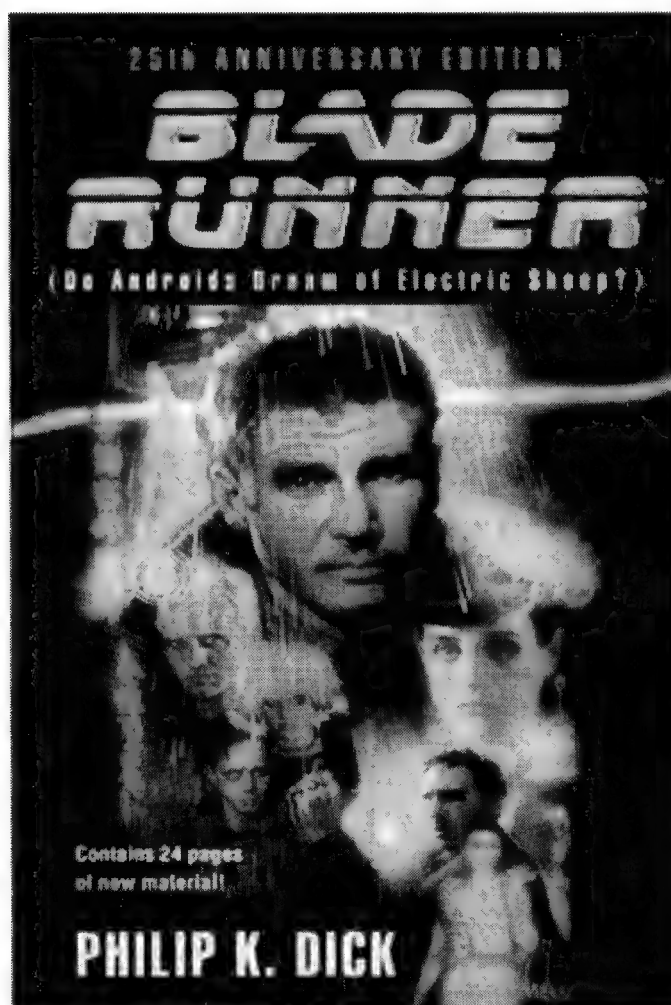
lot of snooty critics — might say about *Blade Runner*, since its release this film has remained wildly popular with a solid segment of the science-fiction audience. Ironically, this hard core of fans is also both the group most likely to be inveigled into reading the book that the film is loosely based on, and the one most likely to feel screwed at having been sucked into doing so. The reasons for this typical dissatisfaction

can be found in the differences between the book and the film which, to someone who has seen the film first — which is generally the case — can be quite striking. These range from major themes, to significant subthemes, to minor but nonetheless jarringly different details.

They start with the motivations for protagonist Rick Deckard, who in the film is forced to continue serving as an android-hunting “blade runner” (a term that never appears in the book, which uses the more traditional “bounty hunter” instead). In

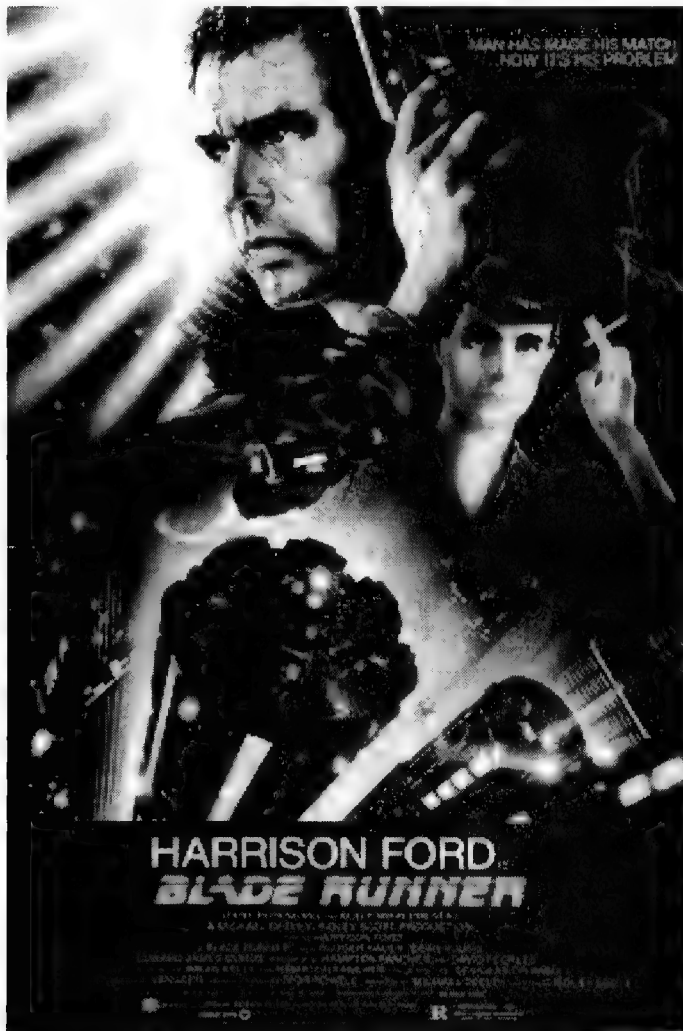
the book, he is willing to risk his life killing the human-like artificial androids so that he can earn enough money to purchase a synthetic animal to replace his broken . . . electric sheep.

Other characters are likewise strikingly different. In the film, for example, Deckard is not married, but in the book he has a hostile, somewhat deranged wife. Genius genetic scientist J.F. Sebastian, who in the film dwells briefly with



some of the androids being hunted by Deckard, has as his counterpart in the book J.R. Isidore, a mentally retarded ambulance driver for a robot pet hospital. Various other characters are radically different, or present only in either the book or the film.

And then there are the subthemes of the “mood organ” and “Mercerism,” neither of which appear in the film, and both of which come off as pretty dumb and contrived in the book. The former is a device that people can use to “dial” specific moods, sometimes selecting even deep depressions in lieu of the insensate ennui they would otherwise experience. The latter, “Mercerism,” is a religion based on shared empathic experiences that, turning up again and again throughout the story, tends to confuse and annoy readers.



The list goes on and on, much longer than one would think possible for such a short book. If you have never seen the movie, or have and did not like it, then maybe the book will appeal to you. But if you have seen the movie and thought it was pretty good, then the book is probably just going to annoy the crap out of you — especially if you pick up one of the editions released since 1982 that have cover art adapted from the movie poster, and are actually somewhat dishonestly titled *Blade Runner*, with *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* provided only as a parenthetical subtitle! (Michael Varhola)

Custer's Last Jump and Other Collaborations — Howard Waldrop et al. (2003) Golden Gryphon

In case you've never encountered him before, Howard Waldrop possesses quite possibly the most gloriously diseased mind of this or any other generation. As a writer, his strange and fertile imagination knows no equal. Over the course of his thirty-plus year career, Waldrop has come into contact with, and infected, numerous other writers with his particular brand of madness. The proof is held within the covers of this book. Fasten your seatbelts — not even a Grateful Dead retrospective could prepare you for the long, strange trip that lurks here.

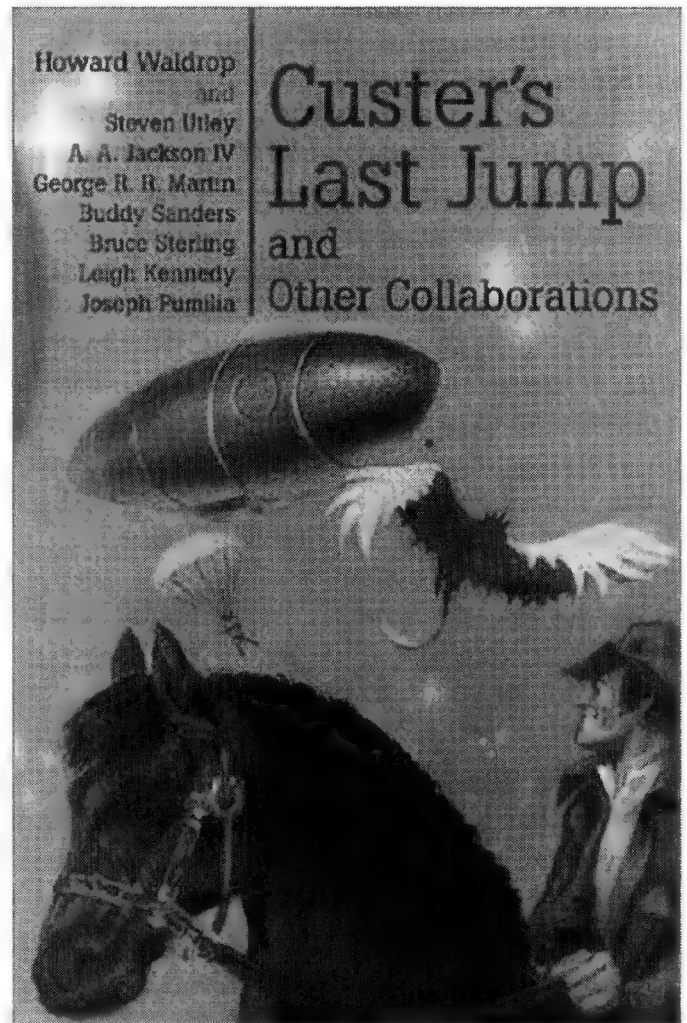
Waldrop's victims, er, collaborators, are an interesting bunch: Bruce Sterling, George R.R. Martin, Jake “Buddy” Saunders, Dr. Al Jackson, Leigh Kennedy, and Steven Utley. No two stories are alike, and the tones struck range from the serious to the sublime to the outright silly. Even when the writing teams are putting the meaning of “outlandish” sorely to the test, they do so with such a straight face that the reader is halfway convinced to take what's presented as gospel truth. There are a handful of short essays on writing thrown in by Waldrop and, while these are interesting, it's the fiction

that is the main attraction here.

Take, for example, the title story, written with Utley. "Custer's Last Jump" is exactly what you think it is: General George Armstrong Custer, commander of the United States' elite paratrooper brigade, meets his end at the hands of Crazy Horse and a squadron of vintage Confederate monoplanes at the Battle of Little Bighorn. By the same token, it's nothing like you expect. It is more, oh, so much more than that. It's not a lark, a spoof, or a sendup of alternate history. Sure, there's a wry amusement obvious behind every word, but if this were nothing more than a one-note joke, why is there a pitch-perfect excerpt from Mark Twain's unpublished volume *Huckleberry Among the Hostiles*? Who can take such an authority as the "Smithsonian Annals of Flight, Vol. 39: The Air War in the West" at anything more than historic fact? Or the reprinted article from the December 2, 1939 issue of *Collier's Magazine*? No, "Custer's Last Jump" is perhaps one of the greatest examples of inspired alternate history ever, behind, perhaps, only Waldrop's other alternate history tour de force, "The Ugly Chickens." The only drawback to this story is the fact that readers will forevermore be tormented by the fact they will never get to see Erroll Flynn, Olivia deHavilland, and Anthony Quinn in the Warner Brothers motion picture "They Died with Their Chutes On."

Utley strikes again in "Willow Beeman," which presages the goofy humor of *Futurama* by close to two-and-a-half decades. An absurd take on the *I Am Legend*, last-man-on-Earth motiff, "Willow Beeman" manages to conclude with a groan-inducing punchline and hold its head high while doing so. Much more substantial is Utley's final contribution, the haunting "Black As the Pit, From Pole to Pole," which follows the travails of Frankenstein's monster as he makes his way through the bowels of the hollow Earth after surviving death at the North Pole. In the process, the tortured beast crashes the subterranean civilizations penned by Burroughs

with dashes of Poe and Melville thrown in before things turn ugly — literally — with a Lovecraftian flavor. "Black As the Pit" manages to capture the flavor of both Mary Shelly's original novel and the James Whale movies that followed, as well as the works of other 19th century authors. For anyone interested in seeing how literary conflation was done before Alan Moore turned his pen towards the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, look no farther.



"The Latter Days of the Law," written with Bruce Sterling, is original to this collection, although the story itself was begun years ago. Another low-key piece, the tale focuses on a complex, secret history of feudal Japan, complete with all the complexities and intrigues of that setting you'd expect from a Sterling story. Indeed, "The Latter Days of the Law" reads much more like

a Sterling tale than a Waldrop one, which is somewhat surprising, since Waldrop's writing voice, while adaptable, is very distinctive. Another departure from the norm is "Sun's Up!" written with Dr. Al Jackson, a balls-to-the-wall hard SF interstellar adventure featuring an A.I. that really, really doesn't want to die when the star it's sent to study decides to go nova. It's the kind of intelligent, fun SF that Analog was once known for under Ben Bova and is a real treat, if only because it's so atypical of Waldrop's normal output.

Significantly grimmer, but more in line with the traditional voice associated with Waldrop, is the Buddy Saunders piece "A Voice and Bitter Weeping." The story is — get this — a future history set in 1999 (which makes it some sort of retro-futurian alternate history now, doesn't it?) in which Texas has seceded from a disintegrating United States, and the Israeli Army, now mercenaries without a homeland, is contracted to bring the rogue state to heel. It's a rough-and-tumble, grit-in-your-teeth kind of war story, complete with lasers, tanks and battleships, and very little comic relief. It's a gripping read, one that will make you curse publishers for letting the extended novel version of this, *The Texas-Israeli War: 1999*, remain out of print for so long. But then I suspect there is an obscure federal statute somewhere which requires all Waldrop books to go out of print before anyone can buy them, so in that light, *The Texas-Israeli War: 1999* is in good company.

One of the few disappointments in the collection is "The Men of Greywater Station," a servicable SF version of Zulu, set on a planet dominated by an intelligent, devious fungus. The story is dour and grim the entire way, with a fairly obvious twist ending, and few of Waldrop's trademark quirks thrown in to liven things up. To further muddy the waters, in his introduction to the piece, George R.R. Martin goes out of the way to point out that all the best bits in the story were his, and that Waldrop didn't have all that much to do with writing it in the first

place. A very strange vibe for a story that really doesn't feel like it belongs.

Do yourself a favor and track down Custer's Last Jump and Other Collaborations, and learn for yourself why so many acknowledge Waldrop as an unparalleled master of short fiction. (Jayme Blaschke)

Inside Out: How Corporate America Destroyed Professional Wrestling — Ole Anderson (2003) Crowbar Press

I love to read books by professional wrestlers. Part of it is because I love wrestling in such a way that wrestling has gotten a restraining order, and I am currently typing this whilst masturbating in wrestling's hedges. However, the main reason is I love hearing the stories these guys tell. See, wrestling is a very political environment. Everyone is jockeying for the same few spots, so there are quickly many enemies made. So when these guys have a chance to tell their stories, they like to bring out a few skeletons in other people's closets to get a little payback.

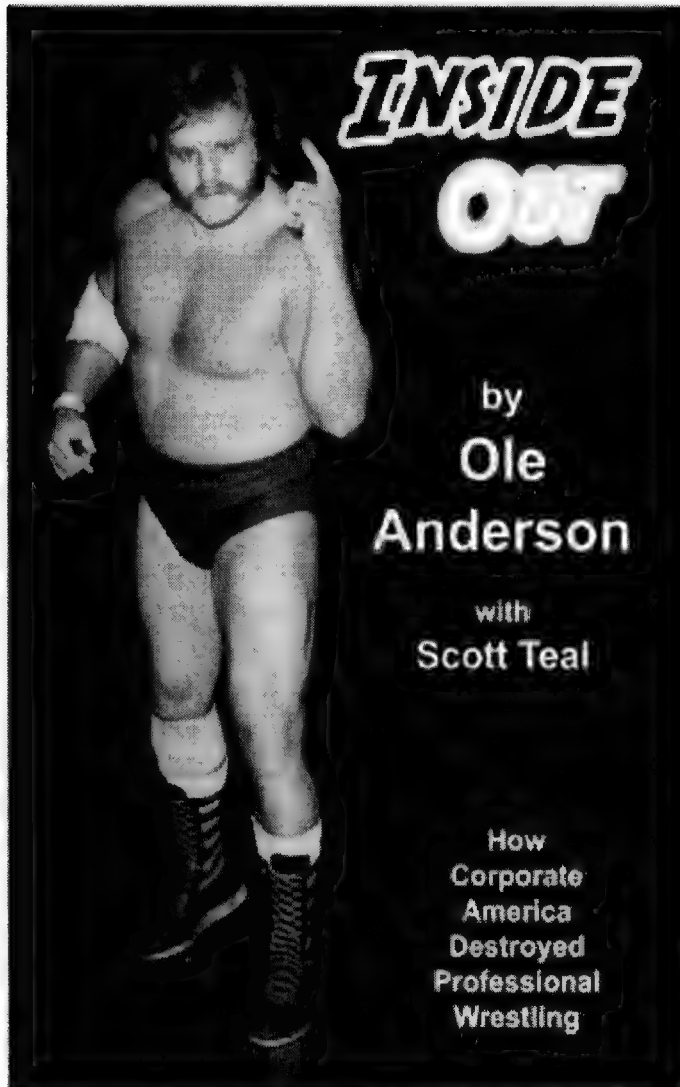
Still, there are a few people so incredibly nice that even they come through these books as dirt free as the boy in a bubble. Abdullah the Butcher, surprisingly, is as sweet as they come. Beautiful Bobby Eaton has never had a bad word said about him. In fact, Mick Foley even tells stories about Eaton buying food and clothes for homeless folk who asked Bobby for change.

Ole Anderson, however, is not one of these people. Ole comes off in every book he is mentioned in as one cranky mofo that hated everyone and everything. He has been painted as the kind of guy who wouldn't kick a sick dog in case it would put it out of it's misery. So when I saw Ole had a book, I had to find it

quick.

I was not disappointed.

See, I never saw Ole as evil in a Kevin-Sullivan-screwing-with-people-to-screw-with-people way. I always thought he was the type of guy who couldn't give a shit what folks think, and people who do give shits always hate guys like that. I know this as I am among the shitless. After reading this book, I am proud to say I was right.



Ole believes there are two ways to do things, his way and the wrong way, and he proceeds to chronicle both during his career that spans from the 60s to the 90s. He covers wrestling through it's glory days in the 80s through the low that was the end of WCW. Mainly, he talks

about the rise of Uncle Vince and how he thinks it killed wrestling.

He thinks is an important phrase here, as how you react to this book mainly depends on how much of it you agree with. Growing up a NWA loyalist, I loved Ole taking on how WWF dumbed down a sport I loved and turned it into "sports entertainment." But if you believe Hulk Hogan is the greatest wrestler ever, you might want to give this one a wide berth.

This book garnered a little controversy from Ole's thoughts on probably the real greatest wrestler of all time: Nature Boy Ric Flair. I believe that some of his points are valid, i.e., Ric Flair has been wrestling variations of the same match for most of his career. Still, unlike Ole, I think it is one hell of a match.

Overall, the book was like spending time with your favorite grumpy Uncle. You don't like everything he says, but still you love to hear him cuss. (RR Moore)

Prisoner of the Vatican – David I. Kertzer (2004) Houghton Mifflin Company

There's a natural inclination to believe that age-old institutions have always existed in the form that they are in now. Take the Catholic Church, for example. Or, say, Italy. Nations are enduring and religions transcend borders, after all. Except that hasn't always been the case. Italy, as a cohesive nation, didn't come into existence until 1870 — and in doing so destroyed the Papal States, which until that point had played a major role as a European power for a thousand years.

It is hard for modern audiences to conceive of a time when the tiny enclave of Vatican City held sovereignty over not only Rome, but over most of Italy, tracing its temporal power back to Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire. It is

no wonder, then, that Pope Pius IX recoiled at the notion of Italian nationalism, and rejected overtures from King Victor Emmanuel that the Vatican surrender claim to temporal power. In *Prisoner of the Vatican: The Popes' Secret Plot to Capture Rome from the New Italian State*, David I. Kertzer outlines the ensuing battle of wills that unfolded over the decades, as both the papacy and Italian monarchy attempted to undermine the other, and draw the other nations of Europe into their conflict.

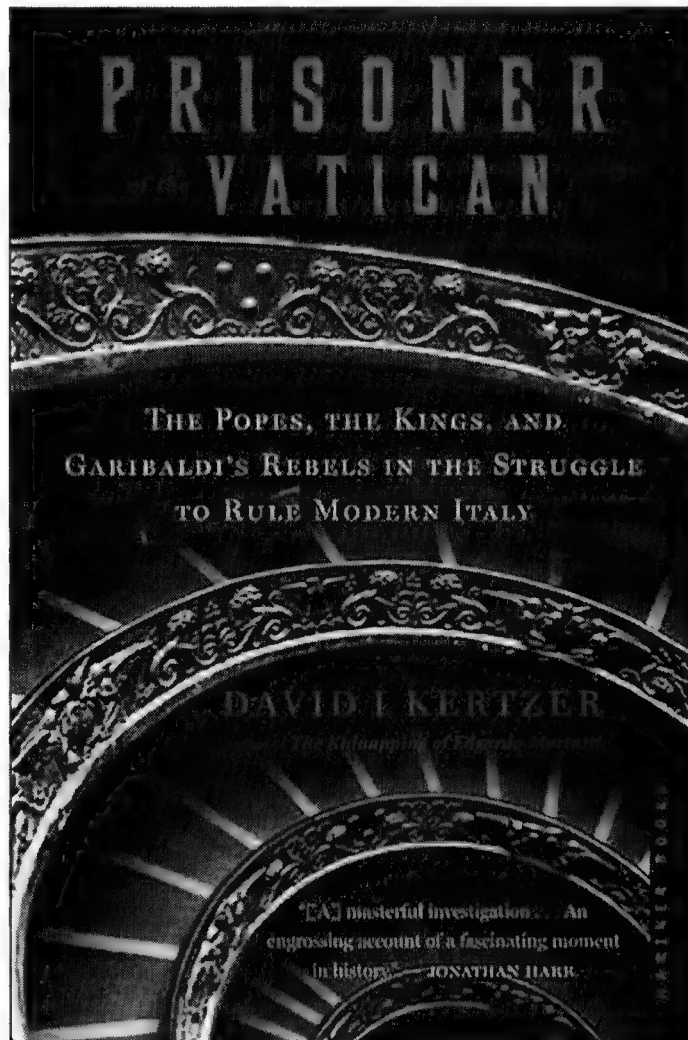
The complexities laid out by Kertzer are enormous, although the book's subtitle is something of a misnomer — there was no “secret plot” to recapture Rome. Rather, the diplomatic give-and-take between Italy and the Vatican was a constant battle, played out through secret envoys and partisan media.

When Italian troops occupied Rome in 1870, they were greeted as heroes even as Pope Pius IX retreated to the Vatican, refusing to acknowledge the new kingdom of Italy, and declaring himself a prisoner even as he excommunicated Emmanuel. The fall of the Papal States roiled the continent, with conservative Catholics in France agitating for war, and predominantly Catholic Spain and Austria not unsympathetic to the pope's plight. Pius IX periodically threatened to flee Rome, a prospect that would guarantee more political turmoil for all of Europe, and most nations eventually worked to discourage this action,

albeit out of purely self-interested motivations. It is ironic then, that two Protestant nations —

Great Britain and Germany — emerged as the most likely havens for the pope, should he depart the Vatican, with both countries looking for ways to diplomatically undercut France.

If there is a fault with Kertzer's book, it is that at times the tale grows repetitious in the telling. Popes and kings come and go, and each time there is a change of leadership, overtures are made in a vain



attempt to end the crippling stalemate between church and state. And each time, such efforts are undone by extremists on both sides unwilling to settle for half a loaf in the belief a full loaf is their due. Just when the sprawling, decades-long history is about to descend into tedium, however, something shocking happens to raise the stakes. The shocking imagery of Italian anticlerical radicals attacking the funeral procession of Pius IX, with the intent of throwing his remains into the Tiber River, is overshadowed only by members of the Roman Curia pulling every diplomatic string they can in order to plunge Europe into a continent-wide

war sanctioned by God, in order to return the pope to temporal power.

Such machinations are difficult to fathom in modern times, when the Vatican's influence has waned so dramatically even among devout Catholics, and the pope is a globe-trotting ambassador who rides around in a bullet-proof car when not trying to tamp down some scandal or other. But *Prisoner of the Vatican* paints a thorough picture of another century in which religion and politics did mix on a regular, almost continuous basis, with results that were often disastrous for all concerned. (Jayme Blaschke)

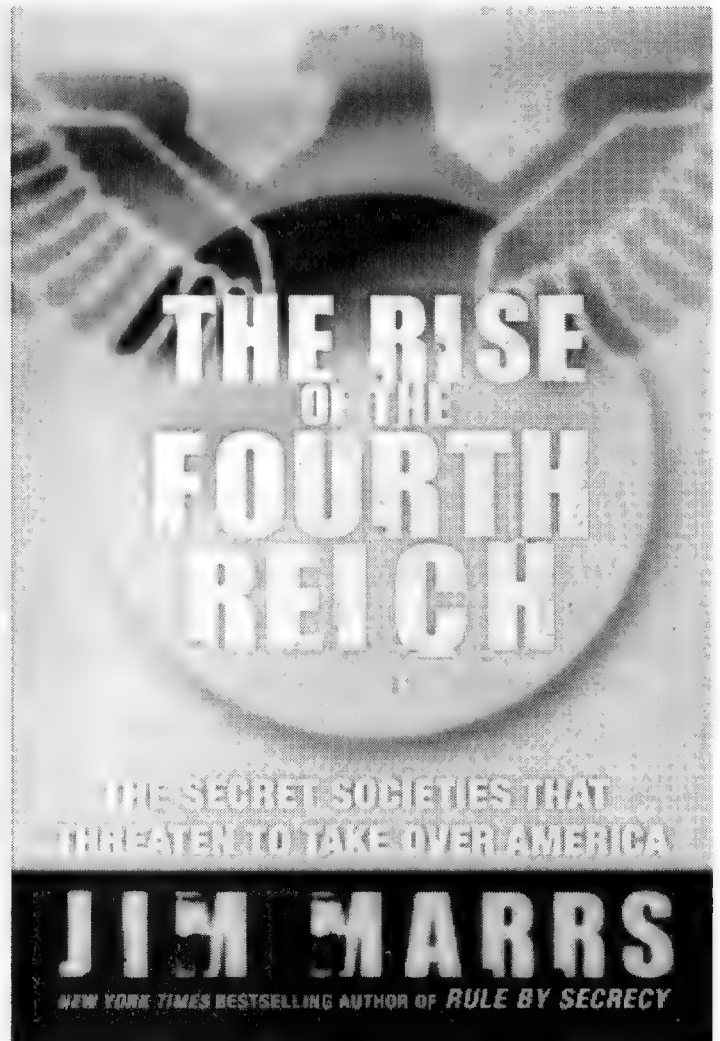
The Rise of the Fourth Reich — Jim Marrs (2008) Harper

Author Jim Marrs' *The Rise of the Fourth Reich* is not a book to be read lightly. After completing it, a reader will either have wasted the time spent to work their way through nearly four hundred pages of increasingly complex and disturbing data and relationships, or be forced to acknowledge things about the world that they can no longer ignore (even if it was possible to do so when they only vaguely suspected they might be true).

Marrs is the author of several bestselling books that focus largely on subjects like conspiracies, secret societies, the subversive agendas of "power elites," and the like; works that tend to resonate on some level with many modern readers (while variously enthralling or repelling those at the extreme ends of the spectrum). Some of his other titles include *Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy*, the book upon which the Oliver Stone film *JFK* is based; *The Terror Conspiracy: Deception, 9/11 and the Loss of Liberty*; and *Alien Agenda: Investigating the Extraterrestrial Presence*

Among Us.

Because it alludes to subjects like the Templars and Illuminati, which have become familiar even to the unread through popular films, *The Rise of the Fourth Reich* is in some ways very much a product of its time. As indicated by a significant number of online reviews of his books, however, some readers are disinclined to take any of Marrs' work seriously, simply because he goes far beyond these popular themes and into the realm of UFOs, time travel, and conspiracy theories.



And Marrs is certainly no less extreme in his approach in *The Rise of the Fourth Reich* than in any of his other works. His thesis in this book is, in short, that the industrial and philosophical basis of Nazi Germany was not destroyed

in World War II, even though its political and military apparatus was. Beyond just surviving, Marrs says, these systems were disseminated around the world, notably to the United States, and have subsequently become an integral part of what Eisenhower dubbed “the military-industrial complex” — and cautioned Americans to beware of.

“Always remember that a typical attribute of fascism is the merging of state and business leadership,” Marrs writes. “In fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the state gained control over the corporations. In modern America, corporations have gained control over the state. The end result is the same.”

Marrs demonstrates this merger, which was well underway by the early 20th century, and his revelations are disturbing and even a little sickening, especially when considered in light of each other. These include, for example, Prescott Bush’s role as a principal in corporations that supported the rise of Hitler in Germany, his son George H.W. Bush’s support of secret Nazi assistance programs while director of the CIA, and his grandson George W. Bush’s use of propaganda techniques identical to those used in fascist Germany. And revelations about the pro-Nazi activities of individuals (e.g., Dick Cheney, Nelson Rockefeller, Donald Rumsfeld) and companies (e.g., Chase, IBM, I.G. Farben) we all are explicitly familiar with are equally horrifying.

Isolated facts aside, whether or not Marrs’ conclusions in *The Rise of the Fourth Reich* are correct, they do constitute a unified theory on why things are the way they are in the United States today. The unending wars, with vague justifications and no apparent end in sight, to which Americans are becoming accustomed, for example, are perfectly explained in his schema (and he certainly articulates the possible motivations behind the current U.S. military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan better than any major political leaders have in the past nine years).

His detractors and extreme conclusions aside, Marrs does not write like a nut and presents his case adeptly. And, the rather sensationalistic title of the book notwithstanding, he does nonetheless maintain a sober style of writing that lends credibility to his case. He also does a fairly good job of weighing even information that supports his case, and expressing skepticism about claims that he does not deem likely.

At forty two pages, the most substantial chapter in the book — and one of the most fantastic — is on “Nazi Wonder Weapons” such as the familiar V2 rockets. This chapter focuses in some detail on the German atomic weapons program, and touches briefly on things like flying-saucer-shaped concept aircraft and the “Bell,” an energy-manipulating device with some characteristics of a time machine. One of the most compelling things Marrs does in this chapter is present a believable case that the Germans might have not just had functioning atomic bombs late in the war, but that they might have tested them on a number of Russian targets — and that the weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki several months after the Nazi surrender might have been of German manufacture, and transferred to the United States as part of a deal on behalf of certain Nazi leaders and researchers.

There are a few potential or actual flaws in *The Rise of the Fourth Reich*. While the sprawling patchwork of facts presented by Marrs has disturbing implications when considered as a whole, beginning to build inexorably early in the book and reaching critical mass well before its conclusion, it does not always go beyond implications of probabilities or possibilities. And as largely a distillate of other authors’ findings and points of view, it often presents a disturbing collage, but one that was not necessarily intended to hang together.

Marrs also draws almost exclusively on secondary rather than primary sources, so the overall effect of his presentation is potentially

undermined by any weaknesses in the works of the disparate authors to whom he refers. This methodology has been effectively applied in the case of other significant books, of course (e.g., William Manchester's *The Arms of Krupp*), and does not negate his prodigious accomplishment with *The Rise of the Fourth Reich*.

Marrs does also not necessarily define unfamiliar concepts explicitly, and readers who want to completely understand what he is talking about may need to do some external research. He extensively uses the term "globalists," for example, and while this likely evokes some sort of an image for most readers — and one that will crystallize as they work their way through this book — a full definition requires recourse to third-party sources.

A minor but nonetheless annoying downside that emerges in the second half of the book is some rather sloppy editing, which typically manifests itself in a particular name being spelled one way initially and a different way a little further on in the text. This never actually reduces the clarity of the book, but one would think a big publisher like Harper Collins could do better.

Marrs' chapter on religion is somewhat light-weight and a bit of a disappointment. In it, the author puts almost as much effort into decrying liberal attacks on organized religion, rather than on the overtly cynical ends to which the political and social institutions he builds a case against throughout his book have increasingly used many American churches (i.e., as a means of disseminating "values" calculated to erode personal freedoms). Marrs' own voice comes through in this chapter more so than many of the others, and it is conflicted.

In the end, however, these blemishes are minor compared to the great work Marrs has done in *The Rise of the Fourth Reich*, and his message is not greatly diminished by them. And even if someone is not inclined to agree with Marrs' conclusions — that the social, political, and

economic institutions of the United States have been suborned by de facto or actual Nazis — the information he provides to support them is interesting in and of itself, and it will be a rare reader who does not walk away knowing much more than they did before. (Michael Varhola)

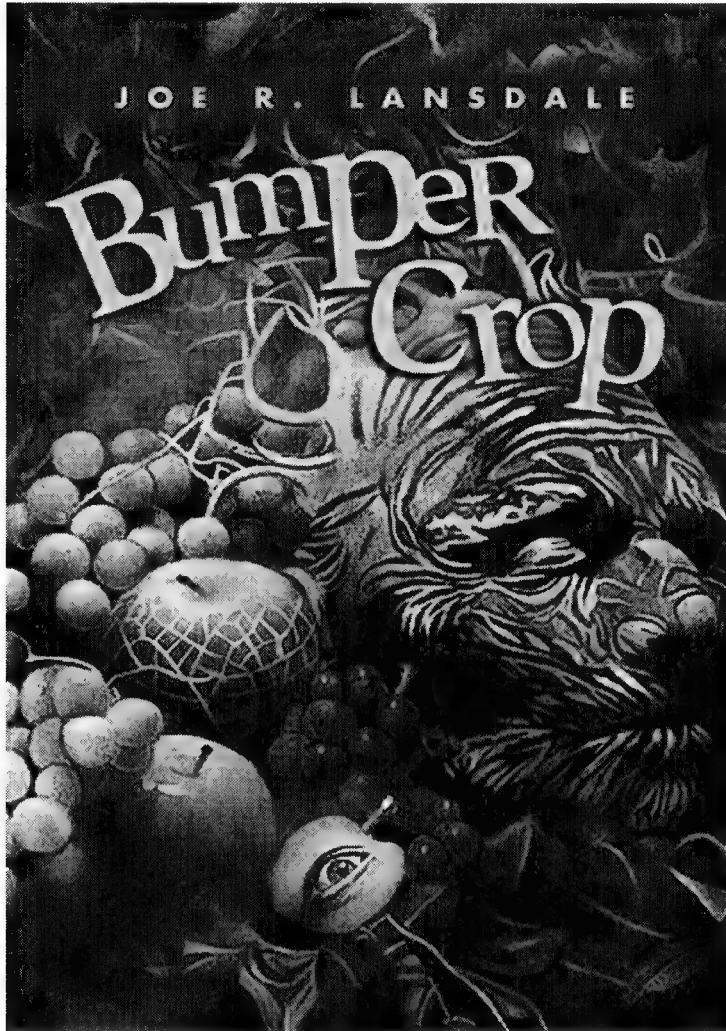
Bumper Crop — Joe R. Lansdale (2005) Golden Gryphon

Confession time: I'm not a huge horror fan. Yes, I read the occasional short piece and keep up with the trends in the field, but when it comes to leisure time reading, I don't seek it out. The chills and thrills and outright scares don't push the same buttons in my reptilian hindbrain that they do in true fans of the genre. That said, it's time to pull up a chair as I spend the next half-dozen paragraphs telling you why you need to go out and buy Joe Lansdale's creep-fest collection, *Bumper Crop*.

I'm a great admirer of Lansdale's writing prowess. That, in a nutshell, is why I'm willing to read pretty much anything put out under his byline. And he writes some damn horrific stuff, things that I wouldn't go within a hundred miles of otherwise. But Lansdale has such a natural skill with the written word that I'm enraptured by the raw elegance of his storytelling down to the sentence level. He writes with such an unabashed confidence — treats the most hideous subjects with a reverent tenderness, shovels the most rancid cow pies with the straightest face — that there's almost no way a reader can't fall under his spell.

So what I'm basically saying here is that *Bumper Crop* is Lansdale's version of a Greatest Hits album, right? Wrong. *High Cotton* is his Greatest Hits. Top to bottom, it's a better book, with better stories. If you don't own it, you should track it down post-haste. What *Bumper Crop* amounts to is the literary equivalent of a "Best Of" record,

gathering those popular album cuts and B-sides that weren't really hits, but have proven their popularity in workman-like fashion over the long haul. Taken together, the two books comprise a pretty definitive overview of Lansdale's short fiction career.



The width and breadth of Lansdale's ability isn't quite as apparent here as in that earlier collection, but it's still impressive. "Cowboy," an urban vignette touching on old west stereotypes, is as understated and melancholy as they come, with an emotional resonance that lingers far longer than it takes to read the story. "Fire Dog," on the other hand, is a matter-of-fact sprint of absurdity, following the career of a man forced to take a job as a fire department's mascot. Delivered with Lansdale's unflappable,

look-you-square-in-the-eye style, the one thing that's conveyed beyond any doubt is that you do not ever want to play poker against this man. That is, unless you want to lose.

The surreal "Fish Night" is moody and atmospheric, strongly reminiscent of Steven Utley's 1976 story "Ghost Seas," which explored similar themes in similar fashion. This being a Lansdale story, however, the reader can be assured that it's got significantly more teeth than the Utley piece. "The Shaggy House" is a weird adventure that combines elements of Lansdale's "God of the Razor" cycle of stories with his Something Lumber This Way Comes and even Bubba Ho-Tep. Wicked vampire houses would do well to stay on the good side of the geriatric set. "The Man Who Dreamed" is something of a retelling of the Cassandra myth, as filtered through Ray Bradbury. It's as effective as it is unpretentious.

A good percentage of the stories are pretty brutal horror tales, made all the more powerful by contrast with some of the lighter fare here. "God of the Razor" opens the book on a resoundingly harsh note, with bloody goings-on at the cursed Galveston house featured so prominently in Lansdale's novel Nightrunners. It's good, but disturbing. "Duck Hunt" is a gruesome coming-of-age tale, in which a young boy gets more than he bargained for on his rite of passage hunting trip with his father. "Down By the Sea Near the Great Big Rock" chronicles a happy family's descent into homicidal madness on what was to be an innocent weekend camping trip. Sometimes senseless violence can be so, well, senseless, but Lansdale turns a merely troubling story into one that's downright sinister with an unforeseen denouement. The final story, "Master of Misery," draws heavily on Lansdale's martial arts background for a bare-knuckled take on "The Most Dangerous Game." The style and tone is reminiscent of "My Steel Valentine,"

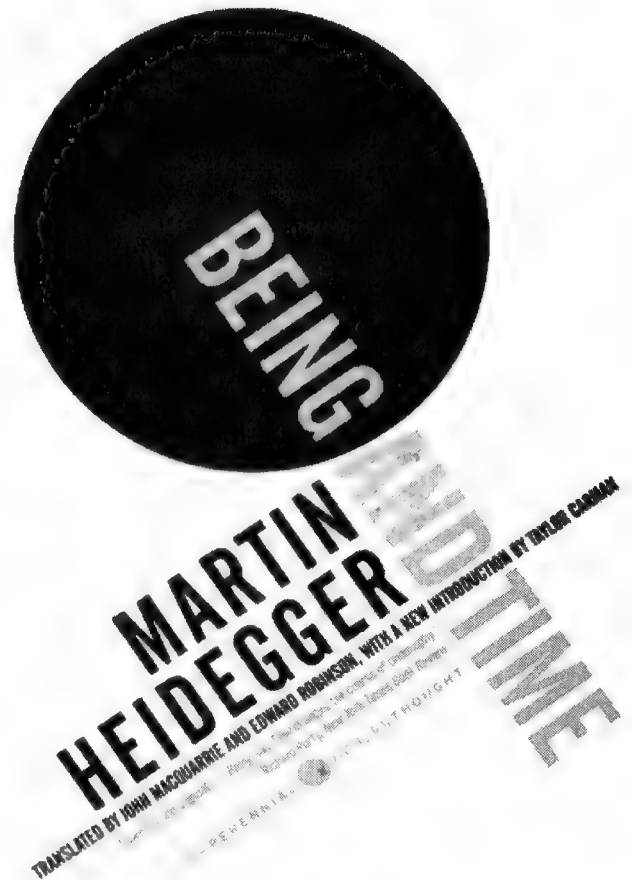
collected earlier in High Cotton, but unlike that story, "Master of Misery" boasts no winners once the fighting is done, only losers.

Longtime fans of Lansdale will most likely already have Bumper Crop, or at least have the stories collected here in some form or fashion. Newcomers to his work will be better off sampling High Cotton, since there's a wider range and variety of story on display in that collection. But for those readers arriving late to the party — be they casual fans or disciples of Mojo Storytelling — well, this book was made for you. For all those readers who've been unable to track down Lansdale's older collections like Bestsellers Guaranteed and A Fistful of Stories, again, this book was made for you. It contains some weird stuff and some scary stuff, but all of it's good stuff. If a hearty dose of Mojo Storytelling is what you've got a craving for, you've come to the right place. (Jayme Blaschke)

Being and Time – Martin Heidegger (1927) Harper Perennial Modern Classics

To read Martin Heidegger is the first step in the process to truly existing, to breaking on through to the other side. Of course, this is also possible with The Doors' music and D. H. Lawrence's poetry, but with song and poesy you have art working toward the ineffable, and thus utilizing those forms of expression as a means to higher consciousness is much more problematic. Reading even someone as "deep" as Heidegger is an easier road as you're working with the subject-verb-object thing and so have a fighting chance to get back where you belong, that is to say, the "real" world and your place what is in it. Dig! Heidegger can help with this. This is NOT to say that a careful reading of Being and Time will result in coming to understand the "meaning" of your life or anyone else's, but it WILL bring about

a germination, an atavistic growth, a sense of "being," and hell, that's enough for now. Besides, can we ever believe or put our faith in "meaning"? I mean, one can find "meaning" or a kind of truth in the hopelessly mediocre landscapes of Adolph Hitler. Hopefully, that "meaning" or "truth" doesn't lead to a greater "meaning," that is, to a wholesale embrace of National Socialist politics.



Which brings me to the troublesome facts of Heidegger's life. Martin was a Nazi party member from 1933, the year Hitler ascended to power, to the WW II's end in 1945. In between, he wrote quite a number of anti-Semitic tracts, and actively and quite vocally supported Der Fuhrer and his policies. That's horrible, but, in the end, irrelevant. Books are either well written or they are not. That is all. You start looking at the writer behind the work, you

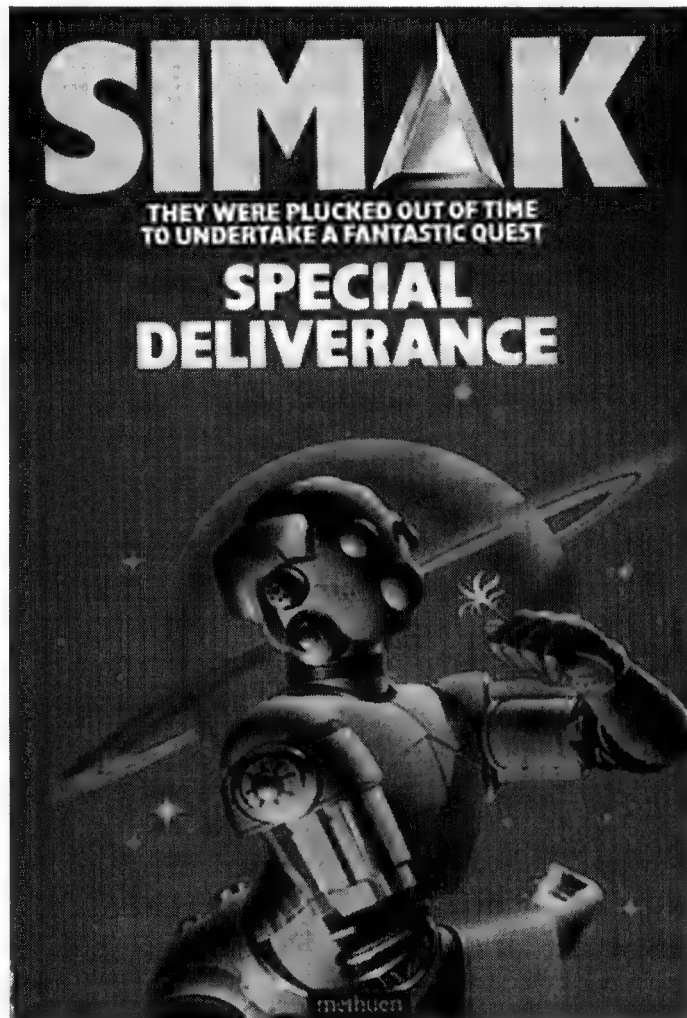
end up with a bonfire going in the backyard. But I digress, you need to read Heidegger's *Being and Time*, starting with the excellent introduction "How to Read Heidegger" by Mark Wrathall. It's cheap, short, to the point, and readily comprehensible. It serves as a perfect introduction to Heidegger, neither obsessively concentrating on his Nazi past nor ignoring it, and providing crystal-clear explanations of the philosopher's thought.

After that, you'll want to go to the source; trust me, here, it's worth the time and effort. Don't be daunted by those claiming *Being and Time* to be inscrutable. Heidegger writes in an often quite readable style. Occasionally, his ideas stretch beyond the boundaries and rules of language and grammar and so become a bit, um, confusing; Heidegger claimed intelligibility was suicide to philosophy — what of that? The road to higher consciousness is never easy. (Or as Heidegger puts it, the "authentic self.") To travel along THE path is to harrow Hell, Hell which cloaks itself in a plethora of disguises, its favorites being that of anxiety and non-being. To become fully human, to fully "be" and unleash all of one's potential, we must make this journey. To refuse to do so, is to live falsely under the assumed identity of the crowd, or the "they-self." Dive deep into this timeless and sublime work, and shrug off the shackles of the unreal ego in which society has chained you. The "me" you discover may not be the "they" with which you have grown comfortable, but you can take comfort in the fact that it is the real "you." Well, maybe not, but it IS all about the journey, isn't it? (Dom Salemi)

Special Deliverance — Clifford D. Simak (1982) Del Rey

Clifford D. Simak was one of a band of science fiction writers who came of age during the golden age of pulps, building his reputation on stories of super-science and wonder. Unlike

many of his contemporaries, however, Simak refused to allow the era to forever define his writing, and as the years passed he continued to refine his style, incorporating new literary approaches and continually stretching himself. The end result is that *Special Deliverance*, published in the early 80s, reads with a contemporary sophistication — albeit one firmly rooted in the early days of the genre which Simak helped establish.



Simak slyly sets up the story in an almost farcical way — harried college professor Edward Lansing catches a student cheating by turning in a paper obviously written by someone else. The student's most unlikely explanation — that he won it from a slot machine — piques Lansing's interest. Lansing investigates, discovers the slot machine, and plays it, an act

which sets off a chain of events leaving him stranded on an alien world with a motley crew of five other displaced refugees.

The others, it soon becomes apparent, come from alternate versions of Earth, where history courses that differ slightly or greatly from that we are familiar with. The Parson's world is a bleak, theocratic one, and he views everything in terms of absolutes. The Brigadier, on the other hand, knows nothing other than the perpetual warfare of his Earth, and carries himself with an imperious bluster. The others — a poet from a perpetual Greek renaissance, an engineer who knows North America only as a commonwealth of the British Empire, and a robot named Jurgens who remained on a deserted Earth after humans have migrated to the stars — are all equally archetypical. Finding themselves thrust together on a seemingly deserted world, with no guidance or understanding of their situation, they do what comes most naturally. They fight.

Simak's story unfolds at a languid pace, keeping the readers as much in the dark about the inscrutable world as the characters. The reluctant companions are first confronted by a giant, featureless cube impossible to approach without suffering severe injury. Later, they discover a long-dead city still haunted by dangerous super-science far beyond any of their understanding. And lurking on the fringes, just out of sight, are ominous creatures who may or may not be part of the solution to the grand, unknown riddle. As they push farther and farther into the unknown lands of the desolate world, their journey takes on added urgency. One by one, the pilgrims succumb to their individual "fatal flaws," and the survivors' chance of escape diminishes with each loss.

With echoes of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Simak's *Special Deliverance* is a thoughtful modern allegory on society's various dominant impulses and drives. "Good" and "bad" doesn't define the characters so much as "sympathetic" and "unsympathetic," and thankfully none of them

are exclusively one or the other. Even Lansing is far from perfect, driven by selfish motives and irritation with the others more often than not.

In the end, *Special Deliverance* is a thoughtful piece, thematically linked with *Project Pope*, *Where the Evil Dwells*, and *Highway of Eternity*, a sequence of novels written at the end of Simak's career, which explored grander questions of humanity's place in the universe. Don't expect a great deal of flash and dazzle here. This book is more introspective than that, but no less enjoyable for it. (Jayme Blaschke)

Ready, Steady, Go! The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London — Shawn Levy (2003) Doubleday

We'll leave off impressing you with our gear quotient, and instead warn you that you shouldn't even bother picking up this book if you don't know how the author came by this title. Rather, we'll open by noting that it has been said in some cineacles that only the mediocre are always at thier best. During the Swinging Sixties, however, even the mediocre were dazzling the rest of the world. And London's best — The Beatles and The Stones, the angry young actors and writers, both pop and modern artists — were slowly but surely changing the face of popular culture. Author Shawn Levy believes it was all about making youth culture relevant to "any and every form of expression." We respectfully disagree: it was more than that, of course, but in announcing his agenda early on, Levy lets himself off the hook, allowing the reader to delight in an otherwise outlandish "history." A "history" which would put Twiggy and Vidal Sasoon on equal footing with Roy Lichtenstein and Harold Pinter.

So shut down the critical faculties, and jump in and muck about with the simply smashing youngsters taking "Italian and French sensibili-

ties” — whatever those might be — and welding them to the cupidity and boundless energy of the Britisher’s cousins. That be us.



For Levy, history is made by individuals, and those most representative of the time were the aforementioned Sasoon, photographer David Baily, fashion designer Mary Quant, Brian Epstein, and, oh yes, a man of actual historical import, Mick Jagger. Questionable choices all, nevertheless *Ready, Steady, Go!* never asks its readers to take either its pronouncements or judgments too seriously. What we’re about here, birds and boys, is F-A-B. As in absolutely fabulous. And when dealing with that, we

can’t get too far outside the ephemeral, the fashionable, *n’est pas*. You want serious? Go to the back of the book and dig the extensive and scholarly bibliography. If anything, it will impress you with the amount of research Mr. Levy did . . . and discarded. (Dom Salemi)

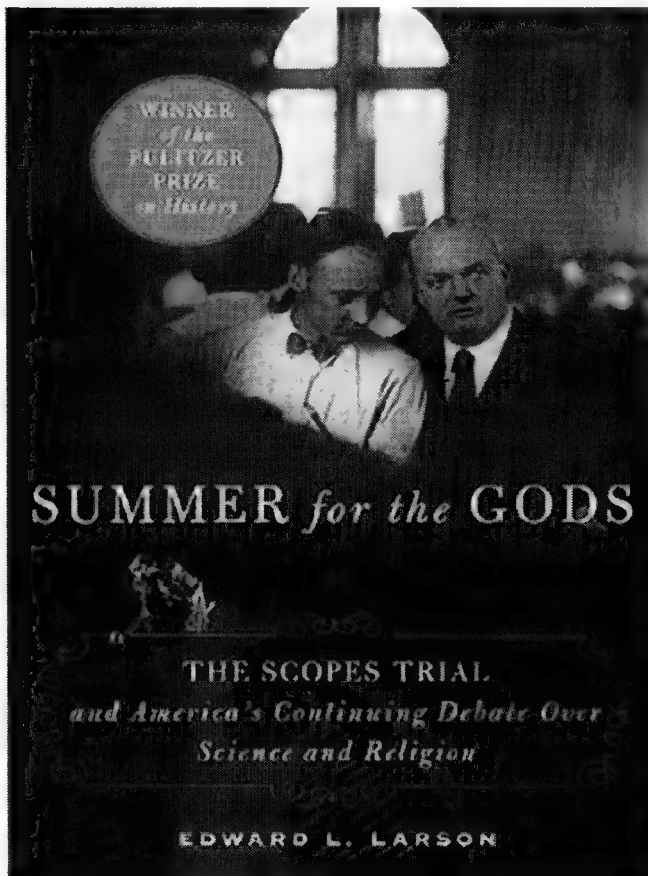
Summer for the Gods — Edward J. Larson (1997) BasicBooks

The Scopes Monkey Trial is the single most famous event in the ongoing religion vs. science battles in the United States. Paradoxically, it’s also the most persistently misunderstood. The popular stage play *Inherit the Wind* and subsequent motion picture adaptation are almost wholly responsible for that situation. Although gripping drama, *Inherit the Wind* was written as an allegory attacking the McCarthyism of the 1950s, not the creation vs. evolution conflict, and thus takes broad liberties with the facts. *Summer for the Gods*, Edward J. Larson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the Scopes trial, strives to set the record straight.

The mythology set up by *Inherit the Wind* crumbles pretty quickly. John Scopes, the innocent victim, turns out to be not-so-innocent after all. Scopes was recruited by the American Civil Liberties Union to violate Tennessee’s new law banning the teaching of evolution. Scopes, single and not planning on building a long career in the Dayton, Tennessee school district, was a perfect test subject. The community of Dayton, for its part, aided and abetted the plan, with the chamber of commerce correctly predicting the media attention generated by such a trial would attract the curious and offer a short-term economic boost. If things went well, longer-term economic benefits may well follow.

The law forbidding the teaching of Darwinian evolution itself was an onerous piece of legislation, not particularly favored by either Tennessee’s governor or legislature. Its

passage was the culmination of two decades' worth of effort from fundamentalist Protestants in the south, a movement headed — at least nominally — by famed orator and presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. Almost from the start things spun out of control. The bombastic Bryan joined the prosecution team, and the rest of Tennessee frowned on Dayton's staged spectacle. Governor Peay refused to attend, and many legislators condemned the staged trial, realizing that whatever the outcome, the state would be viewed as a laughingstock nationally.



Trouble was brewing for the defense as well, with famed attorney Clarence Darrow unilaterally inserting himself into the proceedings, much to the chagrin of the ACLU's carefully chosen team. Darrow, a brilliant but cynical attorney, had a reputation for defending the indefensible, and a penchant for drawing attention in the most self-serving of ways. He also had a personal desire to humiliate Bryan in

the courtroom, who he viewed as an arrogant blow-hard, despite serving with him on the same side of several issues in the past. Too late, Dayton realized the courtroom lark had unleashed forces far greater than anyone had imagined, but by then it was impossible to put the genie back into the bottle.

In-fighting threatened to break up both the prosecution and defense teams. Acerbic reporter H. L. Mencken satirically covered the events for the Baltimore Sun, derisively dubbing it "The Monkey Trial." Amidst all the egos and agendas, Scopes was quietly lost in the shuffle. The few times the defense did take notice of him, it was only to instruct him to stay quiet and uninvolved. Ultimately, Scopes was convicted of violating the law, a verdict which was later overturned on a technicality to the dismay of all sides. Because of the bruising nature of the trial in Dayton, though, and Bryan's untimely death shortly thereafter, volunteers were in very short supply for another test case.

Ultimately, the Scopes Monkey Trial faded into legend, shaped and distorted by Broadway and Hollywood. Despite this, it remains a watershed moment in American history, far more complex, fascinating, and profound than one would expect all these decades later. With the modern rise of the religious right and the growing influence that group has on government and education in the U.S., *Summer for the Gods* is as close to essential reading as it gets. (Jayme Blaschke)





SIX PACK T'HEAT'RE

by Ozzy Fide

The Killing Kind (1973) – (d) Curtis Harrington

Curtis Harrington, the stately queen of the B-movie, apparently never met a woman he liked. In film after film – *Night Tide* (1966), *What's The Matter With Helen* (1971), *Ruby* (1977) – he portrayed the female as either

sexual predators or outright monsters. Which is not to say that Curtis did not make good movies. The aforementioned *Night Tide*, which starred the late Dennis Hopper, and *Games* (1967), one of Harrington's few commercial successes, are today cult favorites whose reputations grow with each passing year. All in all, Curtis made fourteen feature flicks,

all rather creepy and outlandish in their own sardonic way. It's better than even money, however, that Harrington never made a weirder, more disturbing feature than *The Killing Kind*, a dark, dark black comedy in which the audacious auteur's misogyny is given its fullest and sickest expression.

The once-glamorous Ann Southern – who looks to have put on two hundred pounds since her 40s heyday – stars as the all-too loving mother of John Savage, a young psychopath recently released from prison for being a somewhat unwilling participant in a gang rape. Ann runs a fading boarding house for elderly women, but as her "love" for John has no



bounds, she readily takes him in as a boarder and part-time handyman.

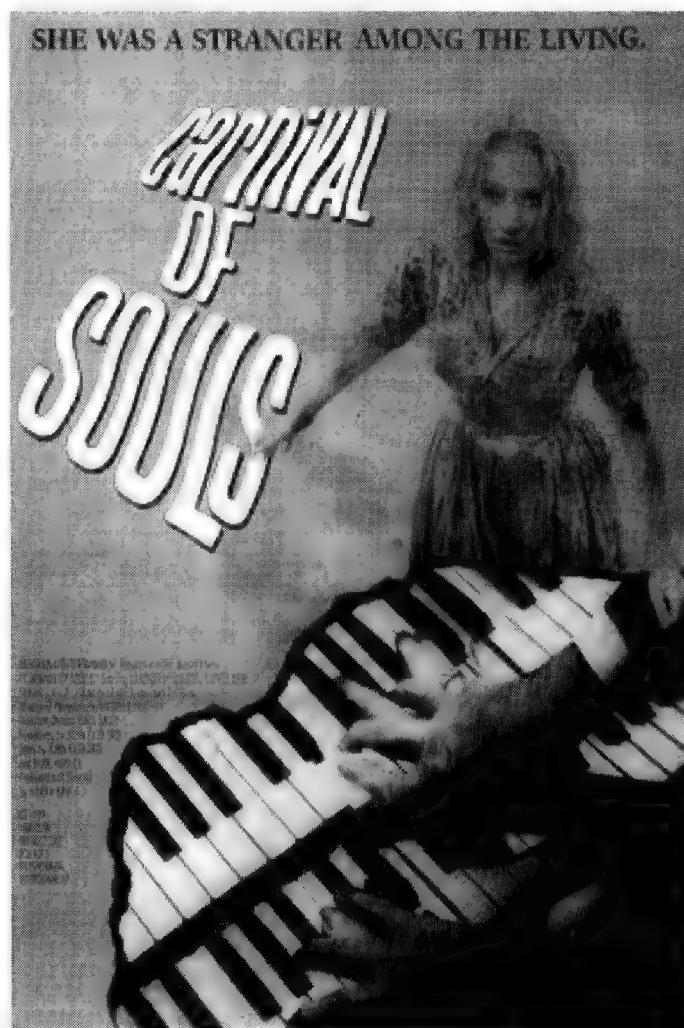
John, who is clearly insane, after settling in, immediately proceeds to stalk and then bump off the people he believes did him in – his rape victim, his lawyer (Ruth Roman), etc., while loving Mom pretends not to notice. John knows that Mom knows and he's grateful, so he graces Mom with long passionate kisses and full body massages . . . Oh, the humanity, the humanity! Even if Ruth wasn't the mother, there is something revolting in watching this once-beautiful woman shaking her now huge tail feather and lustfully allowing the drool to work its way down her jowls.

But wait, folks, there's more. Look, it's Cindy Williams as a slutty, bikini-favoring nymphomaniac with the hots for John, and there's kinky, intellectual masochist Luana Anders of *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* and *Dementia 13* fame. She, too, wants to make the beast with two backs with John-boy. This, despite the fact that John nearly drowned Cindy in the boarding house pool after she tried to seduce him. And Luana, she can barely contain herself after watching our young psycho strangling his mother's cat while peeping at Cindy while she's undressing for bed. It would take Ozzy about twenty pages to detail the complexities of the plot and all its attendant themes; suffice to say, *The Killing Kind* is one deranged and entertaining piece of celluloid: richly detailed, convincingly acted, and nightmarishly humorous. Freud would have had a blast with this thing – Gloria Steinem not so much – and you intellectual trash fiends will, too. Originally titled *Are You A Good Boy?* The answer to that is, thankfully, a resounding . . . Hell No!



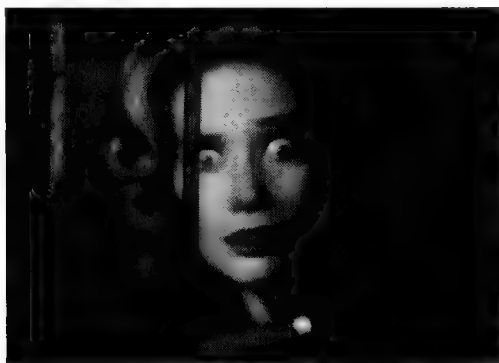
Carnival of Souls (1962) – (d) Herk Harvey

Perhaps more than any other drive-in movie, Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls* was the work most responsible for reawakening interest in exploitation and genre films when it was rediscovered in the early 80s. An interest,



which, today, has flowered into a full-fledged movement peopled by both academics and trash fiends. It is safe to say, moreover, that more scholarly works have been written on the subject of post-Eisenhower era poverty-row productions in the past ten years than during the seventy-eight year cinematic period preceding it.

So what accounts for Carnival's enduring popularity and its continued influence on both popular and independent film? Well, simply put, Carnival of Souls just doesn't look, sound, or feel like any other movie. Yes, yes, we can see the obvious influences of Murnau, Bergman, Cocteau, et al, the film is, nevertheless, sui generis – a work of real art that doesn't so much horrify as hypnotize. A dreamwork asking the viewer not to yield to dreams or dreaming but, rather, to fully cross over into Death's dream kingdom. Everything – the eerie soundtrack played entirely on church organ, the disquieting visuals, the inventive use of quick cuts, the detached and often deliberately amateurish emoting, the stilted dialogue – is designed (or is consigned the better word?) to make one feel, and feel fully, that one has left the land of the living. You can call this state, death; you can call it limbo; you can call it whatever the hell you'd like; what you cannot call it is a reality with which you are readily familiar. If you can imagine yourself slowly drowning, or being thrown from the tallest of skyscrapers, however, then you might begin to have some idea of what it feels like to fall prey to the film's insidious charms.



Interestingly enough, Harvey, a Kansas-based director and producer of industrial education films, never had any thoughts of entering the world of commercial filmmaking. While vacationing in Salt Lake City, of all places, Herk hit upon the idea for the flick after driving past the abandoned Saltair Pavilion. The Pavilion, built in 1897, was an exotic resort erected

on the shores of the Great Salt Lake. Once renowned as the Coney Island of the West, a series of fires and financial setbacks throughout its fifty-plus years of existence finally led to it being shuttered in 1958. Here, isolated among ever-shrinking mud flats, amidst rotting Oriental wooden buildings, rusting rides, and a vast ballroom, empty save for giant dusty streamers hanging dully from the skylight, Harvey found inspiration for his modern day netherworld.



Plan 9 From Outer Space (1956) – (d/sp) Ed Wood, Jr.

So, is Ed Wood's Plan 9 From Outer Space really the worst film ever made? Most knowledgeable film critics cast their votes for big budget Hollywood flops like Ishtar, Cleopatra, or Gigli – if you're going that route we'd respectfully nominate the Scientology propaganda masterpiece Battlefield Earth – but most crapologists would give the nod to Mr. Wood's 1956 effort. The film critic Michael Medved and his brother Harry were the first to bestow this dishonor upon the work in their book The Golden Turkey Awards in 1980, and while their selection has generated much subsequent debate, Plan 9 continues to stand alone as the Citizen Kane of B-films. As Phil Hardy, perhaps our most perceptive and poetic critic of horror and sci-film notes, Plan 9 "make[s] little sense as a film and [is] barely watchable. It literally 'says' nothing, it has no characters, no story, no direction, no whatever; it's a completely unstructured dream produced with no interference from the unconscious mind at all."

Well, Plan 9 is many things, many wonderful



things, but contra Hardy, it is quite “watchable.” And moreover, unlike the films mentioned above, it is never boring. There’s simply too much wrong with the production to keep the viewer’s mind from wandering. First of all, there’s a script that’s strictly from hunger which nevertheless takes itself very seriously. Not that said script makes any sense; that’s part of the film’s charm. It has something, possibly, to do with aliens reactivating the dead – the original title of the film was *Grave Robbers From Outer Space* – to kill off all the living so that earthmen cannot develop the solaramanite,

a weapon so powerful it possesses the capability of wiping out the entire solar system!

However, the viewer is never given the chance to get too exasperated with the intricacies and incomprehensibilities of the story, as Wood has us playing “name that washed-up celebrity” from the opening credits. Yes, that’s a badly emaciated Bela Lugosi as the “old man.” That is, indeed, Vampira, the first horror movie host and inspiration for the modern day Elvira. Look – is that bad-guy wrestler George “The Animal” Steele? No, it’s Tor Johnson, a grappler on whom “The Animal” patterned himself. And, can it be, is it really American psychic Criswell, frequent guest on *The Tonight Show*, the seer famous for his wildly inaccurate predictions? What the hell is he doing in a sci-fi monster movie?

Then there are the technical gaffes which, more than anything else, save the dialogue (more on that in a moment), have allowed the film to achieve cult status. Such as night

and day in the same sequences; a cheesy cemetery set with tousled rugs standing in for grass, and cardboard tombstones toppling over for no apparent reason; a piece of Masonite board, a shower curtain and two wooden chairs serving as an airplane cockpit; police cars zooming across the screen from right to left; paper plates serving as flying saucers. And howzabout all the characters failing to respond when a policeman is strangled right in front of them? And what’s with that policeman continually rubbing his forehead

with a loaded gun whenever becoming lost in thought? And perhaps, most marvelously wrongheaded of all: the hiring of the director's wife's chiropractor, a bald man more than half a foot taller than Lugosi – Bela had passed on shortly after filming began – to replace the legendary horror icon. Wood's solution to this? Have the chiropractor pull the cape over his face and keep his mouth shut. As Lugosi received top billing however, Wood was forced to use the same scene with Bela five times to justify, at least in his own deranged mind, such misleading advertising.

Finally, lend an ear to some of this deranged dialogue (or moronic monologues, take your pick):

Criswell: Friends, this takes place in the future. And we are all interested in the future, as this is where we will all spend the rest of our lives.

Police Inspector: One thing's sure: Inspector Clay's dead. Murdered! And somebody's responsible.

Paula (the heroine): I have to have something to keep me company while you're away. Sometimes in the night when it does get a little lonely, I reach over and touch it. Then it doesn't seem so lonely anymore.

In conclusion, we simply and humbly ask that you strap yourself in and prepare yourself for the wildest of rides. Yes, you must see this. We must show you, as we cannot keep this a secret any longer. Let us punish the guilty. Let us reward the innocent. My friends, can your hearts stand the shocking facts about grave robbers from outer space?



Heat of Madness (1966) – (d) Harry Wuet

Johnathan Wheelright isn't feeling too hot, hasn't felt right for quite some time. Ever since his mother died. That was, oh, eight years ago, when John had just come back from studying art with his parents in Paris. No, wait, eight years ago found John's father taking him to a brothel to finally get it over with. John vomited after seeing all the nude women with their come-hither looks. That's about the time the blinding headaches began as well.



Now John's a badly aging thirty-something with the worst comb-over you'll ever see outside of Bill Murray's in Kingpin. John's not doing so well in the career department, either. He lives in a two-room walk-up on the bad side of town, taking nudie pictures for gas station calendars and stroke magazines. Treats the models badly, too. They come onto him and he, in turn,

yells at them.

Into John's life walks Susan, a horse-faced, moody blonde. Rich kid. Heiress, in fact, but she's keeping it a secret from John. She wants to be loved for who she is: a horse-faced, moody blonde. That's OK with John, as while not horse-faced, he's moody, too. Doesn't really like to kiss or to be touched. Except when he thinks of violence and murder and rape. This freaks Susan out, but she believes her love will tame John. So she spends the rest of the film trying to teach John to kiss and to caress properly. And to find him a decent, good-paying job.

Heat manages the neat trick of being, at once, incredibly boring and impossible to turn away from. Perhaps, it's because we know people like this. We call them Mom and Dad. Whatever. Between the yawns, you'll watch, because the film, devoid of music, lacking anything even approaching style, is akin to looking through a keyhole into Hell. At people pantomiming emotion in a desperate attempt to convince themselves they are still human.



Invasion of the Bee Girls aka Graveyard Tramps (1973) – (d) Denis Sanders

Oz has been asking himself for years why this satiric send-up of 70s male fantasies doesn't have more of a cult following. After seeing it for the umpteenth time, Oz finally understands why this is so. Tramps is an indictment of the voyeuristic male gaze. And, as only guys are going

to watch a flick like this, they ain't going to be getting up from the comfort of their Lazy-Boy too terribly happy about being labled an idjit. Oz, however, has no such worries. He enjoys looking, and he'll leave the psychoanalyzing to others.

Forget the story – brilliant and beautiful female scientists turning beautiful females into male killers – and just revel in a script which asks us to root for the destruction of horny guys. Wait, check that – by the end of



this Nicholas Meyer (Star Trek II, The Seven Percent Solution) script, it's all out war on males of all stripes.

William Smith, star of numerous biker films, plays a GI seeking to uncover the reason for government researchers dying of exhaustion. He hits on the answer early, but ignores it because he's too busy trying to seduce a hot female scientist. In fact, Smith and just about every man in the tiny California town housing the research facility knows what's going on but refuses to admit it. To do so, would involve giving up the fantasy of bedding women otherwise unapproachable. Which is beyond passing strange, as every last one of the male population here know these women are sterile mutant queen bees with no real interest in them other than as idiot prey. That makes them ridiculously easy pickings. Moreover, the women know that the men know. And the men know that, and they know the women know that. So what are we talking about here? Right, social satire disguised as horror movie. Now ask if it's witty. No, it is not. Still, there's plenty of nudity, a contempt for the audience that borders on the profound, and dialogue so self-consciously inane you find yourself laughing despite yourself.

Oh yes, you'd like to know how the bee transformation works, wouldn't you? Well, a gal is placed in a geodesic chamber, stripped naked, covered in gelatinous goo, and then bombarded with radiation. When the radiation hardens the goo, our subject has the baked substance peeled off, gets hustled into a mini-dress and, before she's allowed to leave, she's fitted with alarmingly round sunglasses to cover up her now black irises. And while this takes place, the other bee girls moan and touch themselves in all manner of naughty ways.

There's no ostensible change in our "bee girl" save for the fact that she now hates men. That, and the newfound desire to make love

to, and then kill, every guy whose path she crosses. Sort of like a modern day Angelina Jolie, come to think of it. And remember, this was filmed way before Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon entered public consciousness. So, this is pretty radical stuff, n'est pas?

Unfortunately, the concept, unlike pollen, is not allowed to get airborne, as the decidedly "male" filmmakers let the square-jawed, ham-fisted Smith infiltrate the hive and snuff out our wannabe bees. A pity, as it would have been interesting to see what a society made up only of lesbians and gay men looked like. Probably, something like the West Village after midnight, Oz is thinking.



Junk (1999) – (d) Atushi Murogu

Junk is what this is. Nevertheless, this Japanese zombie flick is certainly entertaining junk. And the reasons for this are myriad. First, you have a talented director possessed of a gross worth's of wit and a terrific eye. Second, said director isn't afraid to borrow shamelessly from other zombie films of the past. OK, make that outright theft, what with music samples taken from George Romero and reprised scenes from obscure living-dead flicks. Hell, the serum used to revive the corpses is the same glowing green as that used in *The Re-Animator*.

So why watch a movie made by such a thief? As Oscar Wilde liked to say – and he would know – "Great artists steal. Poor artists imitate." And here we have an "artist" stealing a lot more than he's imitating, and loosely



translated, that means Junk is pretty damn watchable. Very watchable, as the special effects are pretty special. There's lots of blood, and the thesps tread the boards with

their tongues firmly in their respective cheeks. Plus, we're not given much time to think, as Murogu keeps things moving. We go from a jewel robbery perpetrated by a three-man, one-woman gang, to the drop with the Yakuza at an abandoned military base. The base happens to be the very one where experiments at reanimating corpses once took place. Some of the dead, including one very beautiful woman – Why isn't she rotting? Oh, right, she looks great without her clothes – are still perambulating about the complex. The Yakuza and their leader, a long-haired, puffy-faced dude named Ramon, plan to double-cross the gang.

The zombies, though, make hash of their plans. The rest? We're talking gunplay, innard-eating, fist-fighting and more brains blown out than in all three Living Dead movies combined. It's a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing, but it is a great, wild ride.





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